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GLOBE TROTTER ADVENTURE SERIES

OUT OF THE JUNGLE

By

E. J. CRAINE

and

LOTTA BACSKAI

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INDIA AND PERSIA

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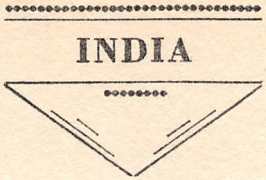


OUT OF THE JUNGLE

CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE JUNGLE

The declining sun was driving slender golden arrows through the branches of the mango trees. The brilliant plumage of parrots and flamingos flashed high in the branches, while gray-backed monkeys chattered, scuffled and chased each other noisily. Unperturbed by the commotion, Nogi made

his stately way slowly toward the edge of the jungle, stepping carefully on the thickly matted undergrowth lest the two small charges on his back should be jarred to the ground or be brushed off by the tangle of slender hanging boughs looping over their turbaned heads.

"When you grow up shall you be an elephant hunter, Gaspar Ghoud?" inquired the smaller boy who hung on with his knees while in his arms he held a mongoose, Kikki by name, whose inquisitive nose sniffed as if he was afraid he was missing a great deal which he would never be able to investigate.

"I should like to capture the Lords of the Jungle, my cousin, but Nogi will be old and my father says his cunning may leave him, so I shall go into the Government service, and he shall carry me about under a fringed howdow when I make long journeys through India," Gaspar answered at length. "When you are a Holy Man, Mahub, you shall ride with us."

"Look, Nogi is taking us out of the way," Mahub called sharply.

"Allah forsake you, wanderer of the hills,

would you have us spend the night in the forest," Gaspar shouted at the top of his lungs, and instantly put the heavy iron ankus* into effective use.

The great elephant calmly changed his course to suit his riders and for some time they proceeded without further conversation, content to enjoy the marvels of nature which surrounded them. The quiet was unbroken except by an occasional call of a night bird just bestiring itself; an odd little ticking noise made by the mongoose, and the measured tread of the huge elephant who had outgrown calf-hood when Gaspar's grandfather was alive, and who still served the family faithfully. Suddenly the beast paused, raised his head, and curled its trunk in a manner that warned the young driver that something very out of the ordinary was close at hand. Young Ghoud made no effort to urge the beast to make another move, but the three were tensely alert as the two boys' eyes swiftly scrutinized the vicinity; ready to dash on, or turn back the instant they learned what threatened them.

*A spiked staff for goading an elephant.

"In front," Mahub whispered. Gaspar's eyes made the same discovery.

"A boy, alone, with no mount," he added in astonishment, scarcely above his breath. He realized that a mere boy would not make Nogi refuse to proceed, for he had been around boys almost all his life.

"It's a native—but." Then their slender young bodies stiffened as their keen eyes took in more of what was ahead of them.

Crouched close to the base of a huge stump whose roots stretched like the arms of an octopus, was a lad of twelve or thirteen who wore the loose robe and turban of a high-caste Hindu. His face was dark by years of living under the sun of India, but his head-gear tilted over one ear revealing the fair, wavy hair which belongs to England. From all appearances he had been startled out of a sound sleep by something fearful. His face was a pasty white, as if all the blood had raced out of it, and his dark blue eyes were held in fascinated helplessness. With a gasp of horror the riders saw that a few feet in front of the lad, a huge snake was coiled.

Half of its great body was straight as a ramrod as it swayed leisurely before its paralyzed victim.

"It's a cobra," Mahub chattered in terror.

"Hush," Gaspar whispered softly. "Let Kikki go!"

Mahub quickly swung the little beast from his shoulder, but before he could even direct its attention, it shot from his hands, like a bullet from a gun, and split the still air with its shrill, challenging cry of battle. At the sound, the snake's head turned ever so slightly, its tongue lashed out like a rapier, but an instant later the vice-like teeth of the mongoose had found their mark, closed with grim determination on the back of its prey's neck, and tightened like a steel trap. Desperately the huge coils twisted, lashed and thrashed as the maddened cobra used all its strength and cunning in an effort to loosen those tiny jaws. But he could not free himself from its small, but deadly enemy, and finally its efforts weakened until at last it lay still.

The boy by the stump had risen to his feet during the battle, his face still pale, and his eyes held by the fury of the fight. When at

last Kikki released his hold, his eyes were red, his coat ruffled, and he staggered a bit as if he were dizzy, but he soon recovered his poise, glanced at his victim, then proceeded to arrange his coat. The three boys sighed with relief at the outcome, Nogi uncoiled his trunk, and signified his willingness to go on if it was his master's pleasure.

"I say—" the boy started to speak in English, then stopped short, his hands quickly re-adjusted his turban and he salaamed solemnly. "O gracious—" he started again this time in Hindi.*

"At the Government school in Lahore we learned to speak English so you can address us in that language." Gaspar smiled in a friendly fashion and the boy on the ground flushed crimson.

"My Hindustani isn't very good," he said ruefully.

"Indeed, it is pure," Mahub hastened politely, "but we like to discourse in the English tongue when we are with those who know it."

"Oh! Well, how do you know that I am

*The chief vernacular language of India.

English?" the youngster demanded, then added; "I mean to say, do I still look like one when you can't see my hair?"

"It would not be observed," Gaspar answered.

"Your eyes are blue, but our Hillmen's eyes also are blue, some of them, and the sun has browned you," added Mahub assuringly. This seemed to restore more of the stranger's confidence.

"That's good," the boy declared.

"Come thou Friend of the defenceless, you have earned an extra supper this night," Mahub called, and presently the mongoose was safely back in his arms.

"I was in a mighty bad fix and am deeply indebted to you, to all of you," said the lad awkwardly trying to thank them.

"We could not have helped you without Kikki," answered Gaspar. "Not even Nogi dare attack a corba. If you will come with us, you can ride to our village, then my father will arrange about getting you to your own dwelling."

"That is generous of you, but I do not want to go home. You can call me Don, if

you like, but that is not my name," he explained.

"Are you alone?" Mahub glanced about to see if Don's friends were not somewhere near.

"I am alone and I am not going home," announced Don emphatically.

"But your mother—" Gaspar started to protest.

"My mother is dead!" Don's lip quivered slightly but he controlled it manfully and went on. "I was born in India and I want to stay here but they were going to send me to school in England. I do not want to go, so I ran away, but I got all turned around in the jungle." The explanation was boyishly brief but quite comprehensible to his listeners.

"Where are you going to stay?" Gaspar inquired practically.

"Well, I thought—" Don's eyes rested on the dead snake. "I guess I won't stay in the jungle until I find a mongoose," he said soberly. His recent very narrow escape made him shudder. "Looking into a snake's face—it makes a fellow prickly all over—"

"As if he is rolled in mad porcupines?" Mahub suggested helpfully.

"I guess so! I went to sleep; some birds screaming waked me but before I could do more than just move—oh gee—" He slipped off his turban to mop his forehead, for now the danger was past, he began to realize the full horror of what he had been through and it made him feel sick.

"Come with us," invited Gaspar.

"We have a cave among some rocks beyond the village. You can hide there and no one will find you unless you want them to," Mahub proposed.

"I say, that's mighty decent of you—"

"The snake may have a mate coming around," Gaspar reminded them, then added to the elephant. "Put him here, Nogi!" Obediently the elephant's trunk sought the English boy's waist, coiled gently while the youngster balanced himself, then he was lifted and placed behind the driver.

"Now you are safe, but it is getting late," Mahub remarked as he helped Don adjust himself. Immediately Nogi started on his journey.

"I say," Don said sharply, "you won't tell anyone about me!"

"Not without your permission," answered Gaspar.

"We will bring you food and you will be secure," added Mahub. So it was settled and Don was perfectly satisfied that the promise would not be broken.

Half an hour later they emerged from the dense forest, proceeded a mile through less thickly growing timber, and at last came out on a long stretch of smooth table-land. In the distance, half hidden by the gray evening mist, lay a scattered village of homes made of mud, stone, or plaster, and the majority of them had thatched roofs. The elephant made his way down a gradual decline until he was carrying them along a wide ledge, and about half way, the boy halted him where the stones rose in irregular piles. The three slid to the ground and Mahub led the way through a short winding sort of lane to a low, half concealed opening, which was quite out of sight of passers-by.

"Here it is," he said softly.

"I say, does anyone know about it?" de-

manded Don, uncertainly, as he glanced into the darkened cave.

"Only us. We were digging one day and found the hollow," explained Gaspar. He went inside of the hiding place, which was almost as dark as pitch, unless one faced the entrance, but even that was dim now because of the closing day

"I'll fetch a light, I live nearer," Mahub offered.

"Will you remain here?" inquired Gaspar. He thought Don might have changed his mind. "I can take you to my home."

"Thanks ever so much, I'll stay here. You have been mighty decent to me—coming along just when you did, and all."

"Want Kikki?"

"He'd be great company, but I do not want to take him from you."

"Take him."

"You're a fine fellow." Don stroked the rough coat gratefully and pressed his cheek close to the little mongoose, who showed his willingness to remain and make the acquaintance of the stranger.

"We'll come back tonight and tomorrow,"

Gaspar announced in a whisper, then the two hurried out to Nogi, who patiently swung them on his back.

"Peace be with him," said Gaspar.

"I can play with him tomorrow for my venerable parents are going to the bazaar in Lahore, where it is said the great leaders of the Hindus will march and speak to our people."

"The Holy of Holies?" asked Gaspar indifferently.

"Surely!"

"What has peaceful resistance achieved for India, tell me, O Friend of the Stars!"

"The spirit moves slowly but violence breeds only more furious violence," quoted Mahub glibly.

"Surely that is so. You are going to be a lamasery,* but the blood of great warriors flows in my veins. Those who fight—"

"Get themselves killed. My father says, why fight when we have a good Governor General," Mahub finished, then changed the subject. "When I go back to-night, I'll take my scimitar. Don has no weapon."

*A monastery of lamas (Tibetan Buddhist priest or monk) in Tibet.

"I'll take my small gun. The All Powerful commands us not to tempt unnecessary danger and the sahib may need something to protect himself," volunteered Gaspar.

"Perhaps he belongs to one of the great families and by hiding him we will get into sore trouble. It might bring the soldiers here with their guns," Mahub remarked a bit anxiously.

"To him we have given our word, and one who says no after yes, is accursed of men. Here we are at your abode." Again the elephant paused and the youngster slid down before the thatched dwelling of his father, who was a dealer in ivory and teakwood.

"As soon as I can. I'll go to the cave," promised Gaspar.

Nogi carried the solitary passenger to the further end of the sprawly village, over which night was falling like a blanket. The big beast needed no guiding to the wide entrance of the huge stockade, with its tall posts and heavy gate, but now he was the only occupant of the enclosure so no one thought of restricting his liberty by shutting him inside. Gaspar slid from his back, bent

to examine each huge foot, removed one long thorn, and although he was hungry, he didn't go in for his meal until the elephant had received proper attention. In the house the lad ceremoniously greeted his parents, and gave his sister's hair a mischievous tug, to which she responded with a swift slap.

"Tomorrow we go to the bazaar," she announced happily. Although every one of his thirteen years Gaspar had been thrilled to the tips of his bare toes at such a proclamation, now he remembered Don in the cave, and that he and Mahub had promised to spend some time with the stranger they had found in the jungle. "I am not rejoiced that you are going, for boys always make mischief. You and Mahub—"

"Hush, child, speak not so to your brother," their mother protested. "Did he not give the big elephant exercise today—foregoing his play?"

"He has no pleasure greater than being with Nogi," she persisted. "He dreams of being a great elephant hunter."

"The dreams of a man are his life," interposed his father mildly. "You are not

eating, my son—" But then a neighbor called the father, so what the son did after that went unobserved.

Gaspar managed to slip a portion of his own liberal meal into a bowl, get his gun, for which he had traded a treasured tusk the year before, and slip out of the house. Swiftly his bare feet raced over the sandy ground and even as they flew up the incline, he caught a glimpse of a tiny light ahead and knew that Mahub had been able to return more quickly.

"God give you peace," he greeted the boys when he stood in the entrance. His cousin and Don were kindling a small fire, for even in hot India the nights are often bitingly cold.

"May God reward you for your friendship," Don returned gravely, so they both knew that he was familiar with the customs of their own land. "I was wondering why you chaps are so kind to me, with the uprisings, and all, you know—"

"Did not Kikki save you from the cobra?" Mahub demanded.

"Yes, indeed—"

"The mongoose is not an empty head if he is an animal. He would not fight the snake but for his friends," Gaspar added.

"Oh, to be sure, I might have known that," Don smiled. "I say, this does smell good. I had an ayah—" He broke off suddenly and changed the subject. "I'm as hungry as a she-camel." He seated himself cross-legged and glanced into the bowls, which were heaped full. "Oh, I say, did you fellows eat any supper at all? Come and share this with me."

"Eat part tonight and part tomorrow, for my father has said that I must go with them to the bazaar and I may not be able to fetch you any more," explained Mahub.

"Oh!" Don's face fell.

"I too must go," added Gaspar quickly.

"Wish I could, but somebody is sure to be looking for me and the bazaar is one of the first places they will search." He sighed regretfully. "I'm glad that you are going. Tell me about it when you return." He glanced about his quarters, in which was spread and hung numerous skins of wild ani-

mals to make it habitable. "I'll be very comfortable here."

"Kikki will keep you company," Mahub remarked.

"He will, and I'll look after him. This is better than being off in a school where I do not know anyone," he added a bit wistfully, and they noticed that he was not eating much of his supper. Politely they sat near him, occasionally telling him bits of interesting items about Nogi or the little mongoose, but their low voices seemed to lull his mind to matters which were far away and he hardly listened.

"We start at dawn," said Gaspar.

"Back of the rocks you will find water. A small stream which does not come to the surface, but you can see the hole and it is pure."

"Thank you so much!" Then a prolonged silence fell and finally Don looked at them earnestly. "My father may think some revolutionist has kidnapped me."

"It would cause him great anxiety," suggested Gaspar.

"Once I strayed too far into the jungle and

my father nearly died because of his grief. After I was found, he was sick," said Mahub.

"Golly, was he! Tell you what, I'll write Dad a letter," Don proposed quickly, and the idea seemed to make him happier.

"That will be good," Gaspar assented calmly, but he was mighty relieved at the decision.

"It will set his mind at rest. You can slip it to someone tomorrow, don't let anyone see you or they will follow you here. I really can't go back for a while—not until—" He stopped again.

"As you wish, it shall be delivered," Gaspar promised. He had hoped the English boy was going to let his family know his whereabouts, but a note stating that he was safe and unharmed would be better than nothing. Quickly Don fumbled through the pockets of his clothes, which he wore under the native robe, and at last had a piece of paper and a stubby pencil.

"It is good to send him a writing," Mahub nodded. He took Kikki into his arms, for the little fellow was mighty interested in

what his new friend was doing and his inquisitiveness threatened to retard progress. For several minutes Don sat thinking, his forehead puckered in a frown, then he set to work and soon the note was ready. He read it to his companions, who listened respectfully.

"Dad, don't worry about me. I'm just fine but I want to stay in India, where you are, and go to school here. I am great, no one has taken me and I am doing fine. I hope you are well.

Davison."

"That will make him easier," he grinned with real cheerfulness.

"Is it to be given to anyone?" Gaspar inquired.

"Or left any place?" Mahub added.

"Get it to an officer, an officer sahib, and he'll do the rest," Don directed.

CHAPTER II

At the Bazaar

It was still dark the next morning when the small caravan of footmen, horsemen and carts set out from the little village, but despite the hour, Mahub had managed to make the trip to the cave to replenish Don's food supply and assure himself that the English boy had not changed his mind about remaining away from his people.

"He says that his aunt is here, and she wants to take him back with her," Mahub explained to his cousin as they walked along ahead of the family's lumbering conveyance.

"Our word must be kept," Gaspar replied and his fingers lingered over the message

concealed in his belt. "It says not overmuch!"

"If a sahib officer will deliver it, Don's father must be a man high in the Government service," Mahub remarked soberly, a bit later, and Gaspar nodded his agreement.

"We need to take care in the matter!"

After that they trudged along in silence over the rough, dusty road, and occasionally made a short cut across a lentil field to lessen the distance. The sun was coming up like a great flame above the horizon when they halted at a deep well, with a hand-windlass for drawing the water, and here they rested for a brief period. When the men and animals were refreshed, they started again leisurely toward Lahore, which they reached later.

The town, with its great fortifications, tram-cars, white buildings, narrow streets, camel and horse caravans, creaking well-windlass, wandering bulls, dogs and beggars, lay like a great color blotch with the Ghats and their dangerous passes rising darkly in the background. From the last elevation, Gaspar and Mahub saw numerous other

small and large companies making their way slowly until they finally disappeared, as if swallowed by one of the cadaverous lanes of the city.

Once inside the limits, the Ghoud party were promptly absorbed by a heterogeneous crowd of individuals representing every quarter of the globe. There was everything from half naked natives to men and women resplendent in the most fashionable costumes of their own lands. Seasoned travelers came and went with indifference and unconcern, while tourists making their first trips, darted hither and yon with enthusiastic exclamations over everything new; or drew back uncertainly at the strangeness which surrounded them.

The streets were lined with shops and stalls in which were draped, with an eye to the best salesmanship, beautiful rugs, silks, especially woven materials, tobacco, pottery, jewelry, clothing—ancient and modern, to say nothing of a great quantity of sweets calculated to make the mouth water. Gaspar and his cousin had attended the school at Lahore and during their sojourn there as

students, had stored their brains with a vast amount of information regarding things quite outside of their books. The friendship of the venders of delicacies they had cultivated assiduously, and now, on their arrival, as soon as they could get off, they made their way between cursing, excited men and stamping, frightened beasts, to the nearest date merchant.

"May you wear a marigold wreath forever, Nur Ali," was Gaspar's cheery greeting. The withered old man scrutinized them through thick glasses which were so scratched that whatever he saw must have been horribly distorted. Whether it was the lenses, indigestion, or bad business they could not guess, but there was no welcome in his face.

"Get you gone," he snapped. "Have I not had troubles enough with boys that you should bother me, the two of you!"

"You have forgotten us. We did not steal your dates—we are—"

"Well I know who you are!" the old man man broke in angrily. "But do not come here. Five times have they taken boys—"

"You have forgottten us. We did not steal your dates—we are—"

He pressed a generous helping of sweets on the astonished lads and literally shoved them into the street.

An American party of sightseers, under a young, nervous guide, came rushing along and carried the cousins with them until they were some distance from the date vender's. The moment they could duck off, the boys scooted away to the safety of a great square reserved for camel-caravans, and here, amid surroundings more understandable, they paused and stared at each other; then they sat down on a pile of straw.

"Perhaps the school boys have been giving him trouble," Mahub suggested regarding their recent reception, but his tone was puzzled.

"That is no new thing! Often he admitted us when he had a staff for the others," Gaspar answered.

"Wonder what he meant by 'five times have they taken boys,' it doesn't make sense," Mahub grumbled, then went on with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, "Oh, I guess his grandfather ate sour grapes." He bit into one of the dates and as long as the boys feasted, they made no other move, but when the last bit was consumed, they stared moodily about them.

"That message we must get to an officer sahib," Gaspar declared, getting resolutely to his feet. His cousin did likewise, but this time they proceeded more slowly and finally they paused before a fruit shop whose proprietor knew them well. Keeping close together, they stepped inside.

"Friend of the World—" Gaspar, who was in the lead, began, and immediately a woman rushed at them, scattering mangos in wild

confusion as she came. She caught the lad by the shoulder, and whirled him about so quickly that it set his turban awry.

"Come not here," she whispered hoarsely.

"But what ails you?" Mahub snapped, blocking the way although his companion was being shoved with determination. "Did the camel's milk sour in your gullet, or did you drink it hot?"

"They have taken boys—" She paid no attention to the sally, but stooped, caught up an armful of fruit, piled it into their hands, and again they were evicted as if they were pests.

"Do we look like lepers?" Gaspar grumbled, but he couldn't say more for this time they were carried along by the followers of a street procession, brilliant with gayly floating banners, men in rich garments seated on chargers, camels, and elephants. There was a band of flute, violin and drum players, all natives, and the music thrilled the youngsters so that they joined the marchers, yelled lustily, obedient to the instinct of every boy to be a part of a lively circus. This, however, was a serious affair, but the musicians

played such alluring airs that the boys' feet tramped along and their hearts beat time. It all drove Don entirely from their minds, and in the bliss of enthusiastic shouts, they forgot their mission, as well as the strange treatment they had received from former friends.

But even a parade has to reach its destination sometime, so when the drums were loosened, wind instruments slipped into sacks, violins tucked under arms, and a speaker prepared to address the crowd from the shelter of his howdah, the lads sighed with impatience and turned away. Then they discovered that their fruit had been hopelessly squashed, so they dropped what was left of it into the street, and hailing a passing water-carrier, quenched their thirst. That done, they sought a secluded corner under one of the great relic guns mounted in a square with other ancient trophies.

"Nothing and less have we achieved," grumbled Gaspar

"And we have no understanding as to why we were received with so little cordiality," Mahub added.

"We'll try other places," Gaspar proposed desperately. They sat a moment to consider the next move, and at last they chose a tobacco seller, but they did not even get into his place.

"To no more of them will we go," Mahub exclaimed in disgust.

"But we promised it should be delivered," his cousin reminded him.

"That is so. Come on—"

"I have seen no officers," Gaspar said softly.

"Nor I. Have you got the paper?"

"It is safe. Let us go nearer the barracks," suggested Gaspar.

"They have keen eyes and long memories, those soldiers," Mahub objected strongly.

"Anyway, let us proceed in that direction."

They started again and by this time they were feeling mighty anxious. They could not understand why they had been so persistently turned away from old-time haunts, where they had hoped to find an officer, and yet their former friends had been generous. There must be something very serious afoot, that was certain, but what was it! They

could make neither trunk nor tail of it, but in some way it affected them. The only solution they could reach was that they were mistaken for other boys, but that was no solution at all.

With eyes and ears alert they proceeded toward the great fortification, but once they paused to watch a fakir who was squatted under a huge tree and performing for the edification of the American tourists under the nervous guide. Both Gaspar and Mahub had witnessed similar shows, so this one did not hold their attention more than a minute, then they went on, but stopped again a few blocks further, where a great mass of children and many adults were hilariously enjoying a family of "monkey men" who did clever stunts with wires, poles, balls, ropes and barrels. This was a show that was truly hard to get away from, but just as the boys were starting, they heard some one speaking softly, as if out of the corner of his mouth, in English, which was the language least understood by any of the assembly.

"You needn't worry, we'll get rid of them all right," came the words.

"Well, you gotta make a good job of it. No fluking!"

"Aw, don't we know!"

"Sure those natives will stand for it?"

"They'll pin a medal on us for blowing the works; and anyway, they ain't real natives; only dressed up, see?"

"This ought to be a grand time to pull it; while things are sizzling. The English will think the natives did it while they are so sore."

"If you ask me, they don't look as if they had brains enough to do anything, always squattin' 'round. They sit around and talk their philosophy, or they stand around and talk about their freedom, but you don't see them doin' nothin'—"

"Say, keep still, can't you? They don't say anything, but they hear plenty—"

"I ain't plannin' to go home with one of them carvin' knives in my ribs. I don't like this proposition and since I seen the place, I like it less—"

"If you're scared, hop in the train and go back."

"I ain't scared, but it'll take a lot of nerve—"

"There's a bushel of money in it. Remember that. Now, listen, meet me tomorrow afternoon in the camel square, see? If I ain't alone, be on your way until I send for you. We're going to finish this quick and send that government house to —"

"Better sign off—"

"That's so. Look at them monkeys. Ain't they the missing links!"

The conversation stopped, but the two boys had not moved from their tracks. Mahub, who stood a little behind his cousin, could see one of the speakers. At that moment the performers did something particularly amusing, the crowd howled with merriment, and the gangmen pressed closer to get a better view.

"Remember, we're workin' on a few of these fellows, but if one comes to you, don't see him 'less you're sure he's who's who, see!" came a last warning.

"Sure. I see," the other answered. "What I don't see is why they don't put it over by themselves without ringing us in on it."

The assembly milled around the two speakers and the native boys took this opportunity to get out of the gathering. They walked, with sober faces, well away from the scene. It looked to them as if some plot was afoot and their countrymen would get the blame for whatever it was.

"What do you make of it?" Mahub whispered.

"Looks bad enough."

"Guess they thought no one could speak English."

"If evil is done and the natives considered responsible, it might mean lots of fighting," Gaspar remarked.

"You come from warriors; that should delight you."

"O, you are a buffalo! My father has said that when we fight for India, we want to be sure it is our real enemies, not our friends that we attack," Gaspar answered hotly.

"For messengers, we are she-camels. We have done nothing, and everything we hear, but baffles—"

"Oh, I say, boys!" The call came from a crisp military voice and two pair of military

heels pounded the street as the soldiers hurried to overtake them. The boys turned quickly and saw two lieutenants.

"Aw, I say, no use scrubbing these lads. Look at their eyes—"

"We're taking no chances, old fellow," the other interupted. "Orders, you know, and all that. If we made a single exception we might lose what we are looking for."

"Have it your own way."

"Come along, lads!"

"What is it? Why do you want us?" Mahub stammered.

"A little matter of form. Nothing to be alarmed over. Come along!"

There was no disobeying the order, neither of the men seemed unkindly disposed, but it was evident that they were executing some orders and their captives were alarmed. However, they permitted themselves to be led to the long barracks, past serious-faced soldiers, and at last to a huge, high-ceilinged room, the greater part of which was taken up by a swimming pool.

"This end isn't deep," the first man announced. Anxiously the cousins exchanged

glances, but neither of them had the faintest idea why they had been brought.

"What are you—"

"What do you want of us?" Gaspar managed to ask, but his voice was not steady.

"Orders, you know, and all that."

"Strip. That is, er, take off those belts and caps and get into the water," the other added, then the pair looked at each other in terror.

"Er, the water's quite harmless," the officer reminded them.

But it wasn't the water which frightened them, but the recollection of the message twisted in Gaspar's belt. Both of them would have been glad to hand that over to the lieutenants, who were pleasant fellows, but if they did, it would immediately start a thorough inquiry as to where the lads got the note to Don's father. And that would be followed up with a rigid examination regarding the whereabouts of the missing boy.

"Hop in, old top!"

"Why?" Gasper was fumbling awkwardly with his waist band, and desperately trying

to kill time, or find a way out of the predicament.

"Well, to tell the truth, we have to make sure that the color you have is natural, you know. We believe that it is, but we have to be positive, and all that."

"It will be over in a few minutes. Paddle in and go up to your neck."

"We won't let you get hurt." One of the officers produced a long canvas belt and strap. "I'll dangle this and you can hang on to it."

"I'll go first," Mahub offered suddenly. "When my cousin sees me do it, he will not be afraid." In a twinkle his abbreviated clothing was on the floor, he made a neat dive, swam a few strokes and came up like a playful seal. That done, he swam about a bit until he reached the shallow end where Gaspar waited in an attitude of uncertainty. Mahub laughed, came out dripping, and walked to the lad. "Now you go in," he urged. "I'll hold your belt." Gaspar's eyes twinkled beneath their long lashes, but he would have liked to give his companion a good biff, for he too had learned to swim

at the school and under any other circumstances would have enjoyed nothing better than the opportunity to go in this wonderful pool, but he thought he understood the scheme, so reluctantly he removed his belt, handed it in a wad to the other boy, then, after further persuasion, he finally walked into the water, hanging for dear life to the safety belt until he had achieved the feat amid the encouragement of the two lieutenents. It was hard not to dive in and have a good time, but such an act might arouse the suspicions of the officers, so he refrained and came out, puffing and blowing.

"I say, it wasn't so bad, now, was it!"

"N—no, sahib," he stammered.

"Well, we saw our duty and did it," the first man sighed.

"And I told you it was a waste of time. Their color is fast and not manufactured."

"Much obliged for coming without a fuss," the lieutenent said to the boys, and presently, when they had replaced their garments, they were led from the place, but this time the message to Don's father was safely hidden in Mahub's belt where he had tucked

it while his cousin was submitting fearfully to the forced bath. At last they were again in the streets and now they grinned at each other.

"That escape was as close as an elephant is to his trunk," Gaspar remarked softly.

"I thought to slip the note in the sahib's pocket while his back was turned but I was afraid he would discover it while we were there," Mahub volunteered. "Queer of them to want us to swim."

"I have a thought in the matter," Gaspar whispered suddenly.

"Cherish it tenderly," Mahub advised.

"Know why they wanted us to swim?"

"Do you?"

"They are looking for Don and they think he will stain his body wtih dark coloring, like a native."

"That's why the venders of sweets treated us with so little and so much kindness," Mahub whistled. "They have been picking up strange boys and the merchants are fearful of being blamed if Don is found in their place."

"I understood it so I am not such a gnat-

wit, but you are a—"

"Did I not save the paper for you?" Mahub interrupted.

"You did, oh light of the universe."

"Well, now, I have a thought. This man coming is a man of the police. Let us fight and perhaps he will deliver our message," he proposed gleefully.

The officer Sahib.

"Your brightness of mind dims the sun," Gasper declared heartily.

It was a rattling good idea so they pitched into each other with all the fury of a pair of bullies determined to exterminate each other on the spot. Down to the ground they tumbled, rolled over and over until they were upon the shiny boots of the man from the police, who had not noticed them

until their combat threatened to knock his feet from under him.

"Er, I say, what is the meaning of this. You must not pummel each other so. That is no way to fight, like a pair of mad bulls." He caught Gaspar by the shoulder and with a strong pull, wrenched him apart from the smaller boy, who, after looking tearfully into his eyes, leaned against him and wept copiously.

"Oh, Friend of the Poor—"

"There, there, I say, don't do that. Settle your differences like men. That will do. Go along now, and don't let me see anything more like this." A crowd was beginning to gather, so the man hustled them off. If he had stopped to think he might have wondered at their promptness in complying, and that their enmity was so quickly cooled, but he had more weighty matters on his mind than a pair of quarrelsome boys.

"Did you get it into his pocket," Gaspar demanded as soon as they were far enough from the scene to discuss the matter.

"In the one above the seat of his judg-

ment; over his stomach," Mahub grinned cheerfully, then, with a jubilant shout, the pair raced to the place where their families awaited them.

CHAPTER

III

With a Golden Ankus

The two native boys and the young English one were seated cross-legged on the lion skin, the head of which helped balance the bowl of lentils and curry Don had just consumed. His light eyes sought first one pair of brown ones than the other. They had finished a detailed account of their adventures in Lahore in their endeavor to place his letter with one who would surely realize from whence it came and see that it was immediately delivered.

"It was a great stunt, putting it in the pocket of the chief of police. He will get it to my father at once and Dad will recognize the writing so he'll know it is genuine."

"Yes," Gaspar answered in a low tone.

"Think he had a good look at either of you; I mean so that they could pick you out if they started a search?" Don asked anxiously.

"They are not without wisdom," replied Mahub.

"Anyway, that isn't bothering me so much as what you overheard those tourists say."

"To us that seems a serious matter," admitted Gaspar.

"Surely! We do not want the natives to be blamed for something they have nothing to do with," Don declared emphatically, then went on, "Lot of schemes have been hatched but they get nipped in the bud before they can go off because the English and native police co-operate. Dad has told me that."

"It would be very bad if this should go off!"

"There is much restlessness throughout the land. To have something blown up now would be a grave matter. Many lives might be lost before the truth could be guessed."

"I say, what do you fellows think ought to be done? I mean, what should we do about it?"

"You know Lahore and many things. You will know how to act to prevent evil," answered Gaspar confidently.

"But you must have some idea! Did you tell anyone?"

"For your permission we waited."

"You think we should tell someone the whole business?" Don asked.

"Older men have greater wisdom than we have," replied Gaspar soberly.

"And you think I should go home?" Don looked from one to the other. He did not want to do that, but he loved India, loved it so much that he had run away because he did not want to leave. Suddenly it flashed through his mind that by returning to his father and acquainting him with the fragment of information his good friends had stumbled upon, he would be doing something for India. Surely to help her natives avoid disaster, and save bloodshed, would be better than hiding in a cave and letting trouble fall upon the land and the people dear to him.

"Perhaps you can think of something else?" suggested Mahub.

"No, I can't. Do you want to tell your father?"

"A secret is a burden when harm may come," Gaspar told him.

"I say, you have both been mighty decent to me and I want to do the square thing—"

"That is what my father says of the English," Mahub smiled.

"Thanks. Now, listen, you said those men were to meet day after tomorrow." Don sprang to his feet.

"Which now means tomorrow," Gaspar reminded him.

"I just remembered that. Let's go to your father now." He started for the entrance of the cave, Kikki on his shoulder, and the two natives jumped nimbly to their feet.

"Come!" Soon the three were racing down the incline, across the flat space below, on through the village and finally they burst into the dwelling of the Ghouds where they found Gaspar's father splicing an elephant strap. He dropped it and stared at the English boy, then his startled eyes sought his son's.

"We have something important," the lad panted.

"Follow me." He led them to the stockade, and while he fitted the strap to Nogi, he listened attentively to their story. When it was finished he nodded gravely. "In Lahore and throughout India they seek you. It is a serious matter, your leaving home, and many believe that some natives kidnapped you for revenge on the Government."

"Oh, I did not think of that," Don exclaimed in dismay.

"The matter of the bandits, that too is bad."

"I'll return to Lahore at once, Sir," Don declared as courteously as if he was addressing an English official, but the man detained him.

"Eat and drink properly. I will send Gaspar with you on Nogi. Mahub too had better go. At the camel square they may be able to pick out those two men who did the talking in English," he explained, then turned to his nephew. "Fetch your father, I will explain to him, and you start as soon

as you can get ready. Nogi will take you in safety."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than Mahub started as fast as his brown legs could carry him to find his father, while Don accompanied the Ghouds to the house for a good square meal and a cleaning up, which he needed sorely. Finally they were all ready for the journey, Don carefully dressed in a clean robe and turban, in which he would attract less attention than his own clothing, while the bodies of the native boys were hidden under full dress which designated their high caste and were fitting garments in which to pay a visit to the Governmental Department of India. A howdah was placed on the huge elephant, who seemed to understand that a great responsibility was given him, and finally the sober-faced lads started off for Lahore with Gaspar proudly yielding the iron ankus.

The long trip was achieved without mishap and at dusk the elephant strode majestically along the road toward the dwelling of one of the government officials. Twice

servants shouted to the travelers to state their business before going further, but no attention was paid to the order so finally when they paused before the stately bungalow, orderlies and soldiers were gathered to learn what it was all about. A tall gentleman, whose face looked as if he had lived through days of great suffering, was just alighting from his car.

"Oh, Dad!" shouted Don at the top of his lungs. The man turned as if he were on a spring, his mouth opened and across his face flashed lines of a smile as the small boy, not waiting to make a proper descent, or even be sure that he didn't break his neck getting tangled in his robes, leaped into outstretched arms which closed him tightly to an anxious heart.

"My boy."

Then the orderlies and soldiers stood at attention and respectfully took charge of Nogi and her passengers, who waited with dignity befitting their station for a step ladder to be placed. When it was set, they came from their high perch, and were escorted ceremoniously into the great house, where

Don and his father had already preceded and awaited them.

"Here they are, Dad. My friends." Don introduced them both, and the official kissed each boy between the eyes to let him know that he, too, was their friend and grateful for the service they had rendered him.

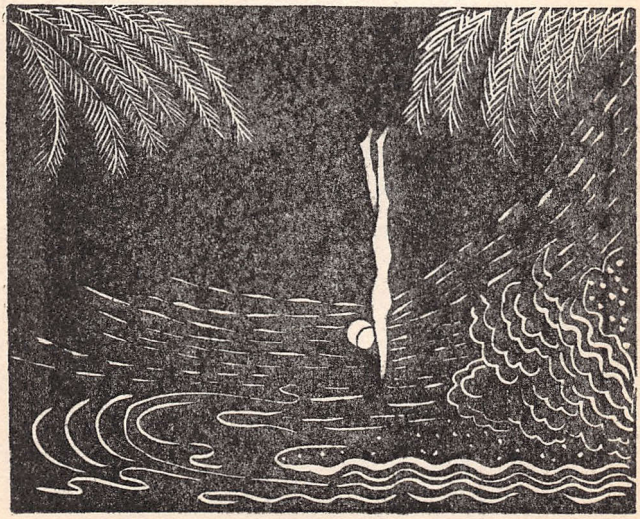
After that, he listened to a detailed account of his son's wanderings, his rescue from the cobra by Mahub's Kikki, the care he had received from the cousins and the elder Ghouds, and finally the experience in Lahore and the conversation of the tourists. His face was grave as he listened, then the chief of police was sent for, and when his eyes lighted on the lads, he frowned, then smiled.

"Here they are, both of them, the young rascals. Rolled all over my boots and tucked that note in my pocket," he growled.

"As a punishment, I suggest a swim in the barracks pool," Don's father said soberly, then they told him of the lieutenants who had to be sure the color of them was real. At that he had a good laugh, but finally he stopped.

"Tell you what, sir, their conduct will bear looking into. Er, ah, I say, why not order them to swim in the pool whenever they are in Lahore if they want to?" he proposed.

"It appears to me that will be making the punishment fit the crime," so it was settled that Gaspar and Mahub were to be given free access to the wonderful pool whenever they saw fit to take advantage of it.



Free access to the wonderful swimming pool.

"Now, about those tourists."

That was gone into very thoroughly, and the next day, the cousins, minus their robes and with turbans less spectacular, spent the greater part of the following day in the camel square, keeping a sharp eye open for the men who had been brought to make the country's troubles greater than they were. At last one chap came, and hung around waiting. As soon as they had spotted him, Gaspar went up and begged. The fellow refused to give him anything and received a round of abuse as the boy withdrew, but in the meantime the man was "'spotted." Later his companion came in accompanied by a woman, so the first chap went off quickly, but Mahub staged a very good fit in front of the couple, who were forced to pause as a crowd assembled, so they too were well observed.

"Good work," a policeman, who wore no sort of uniform, whispered to Mahub, when he finally brought him out of his conniption. "Come along with me." He took them back to the Government house, where Don awaited them with impatience and could

hardly contain himself while they told him of their experiences. Just then a pair of young lieutenants were announced, and when they came they eyed the boys with scowls.

"Oh, I say, you did put it on us neatly," one spoke up.

"But there's no hard feelings, you know. The chief, er, I say, he's a decent sort, recommended us for some little thing because of our strict attention to duty," the other added.

"I might have known there was something of a decayed nature in the Provinces when one cousin loved swimming and the other didn't, but my family isn't remarkable for its brains." They both chuckled.

"We're invited to assist in some—"

"Er, I say, it may be as well not to, er, broadcast," the other interrupted as he thought what was to follow might be still a secret.

"Well, now, you are not so devoid of intelligence," the other grinned.

"I'm—you know," Don spoke up, "I'm awful—I mean, I'm ever so glad to be home again with Dad."

"Here will you find happiness," Gaspar smiled.

"With his father, a boy finds joy," added Mahub earnestly.

"That's right. And I say, he says that I may stay here with him and attend school, and all that," Don went on and his face was wreathed with smiles. "My aunt is returning to England, but my old ayah is coming to look after me again—it's great, and I'm no end obliged to you—you were mighty decent—"

"Kikki will be glad to hear of it," Mahub interrupted quickly, for he didn't like being thanked too much.

But the cousins both had to be officially thanked, for that evening, at a feast over which Don presided, the chief of police made an announcement which brought forth cheers from the guests when they heard it. He told them that the two men the boys had pointed out to them were members of a notorious gang of criminals whose leader had recently succeeded in getting into India. They had followed the underlings to the headquarters, and later had captured all the leaders beside

a quantity of bombs, both explosive and gas. Furthermore, evidence of a widespread scheme to not only overthrow the Government, but destroy the influential natives of India had been taken in the raid.

"Oh, that means, I mean, that's another plan nipped in the bud," Don shouted.

"It does, thanks to your young friends," the official answered, and his eyes rested on the lads, whose dark skins flushed in confusion. "To them I propose a toast." Every guest was on his feet, glasses were held high and drained to the last drop. When they were seated, Gaspar rose to his feet.

"Thank you," he answered, then went on bravely, "My father says that when we of India fight, we should use care that it is our real enemies we attack, nor our friends—you—" It was difficult, but by that time, Mahub had begun to recover himself and he realized that he might help out, so he rose, his glass of thin wine held high.

"Long live the Emperor of India," his voice rang strong and clear, and then, that toast was drunk and the glasses broken.

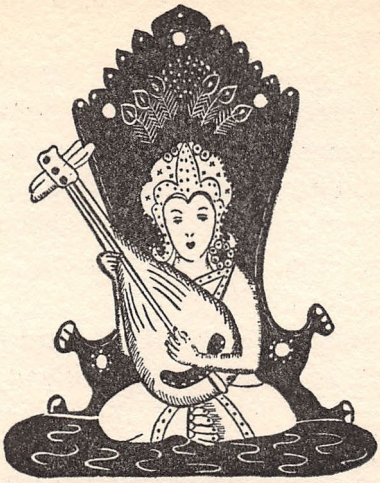
Taken all in all, it was a highly successful

feast, and the next morning, before they got ready to make the journey home, the cousins had a wonderful swim in the barracks pool. Later Nogi was waiting for them, Don's father came to bid them good-bye and thank them again.

"We are anxious that you lads should finish your education," he told them," and I shall pay your father a visit and see if arrangements cannot be made. Also, I have something here," he unrolled a band of tissue and cotton and took something shiny out of its covering, "a gold ankus which was found some time ago in an ancient ruin. As one who loves the elephants I thought it might be acceptable to you." He placed it in Gaspar's hand and the boy's eyes lighted.

"O esteemed—" but the courtesy of his race was too elaborate, 'Nogi will tell of it to the elephants and all the animals in the jungle," he declared.

THE VICTORY OF MIRZA KABUL



CHAPTER

I

From the Housetops

"Peace be to you, Ali Hassan," saluted Mirza Kabul with great respect as he saw the tall, elderly scholar of their Persian village, Urumiah, coming slowly toward him. Mirza was on his way home from school and in a hurry so he hoped Ali Hassan would let

him pass, or at least not detain him for too long a period.

"And to you be peace," responded the scholar gravely in passing, but before Mirza could proceed, the man paused and added, with a twinkle in his dark eyes. "Tell me, my lad, have you yet learned when the new moon takes the place of the old, what becomes of the old?"

"It is broken into small bits and made into stars," Mirza answered quickly; glad that nothing more difficult than that ancient conundrum was put to him.

"Indeed you have learned it." To Mirza's surprise Ali Hassan's hand went to his tunic, and the lad thought he was to be given bakshish*, possibly a penny, but instead, the hand brought forth four smooth round *ashogs* and the youngster's eyes popped wide open in delighted astonishment. "My son killed two goats so I took from them the round joint bones. Because you well learn your lesson they are yours. Now you can play marbles or let them rattle in your pockets where all can hear." He placed them in

*An Eastern term for a present or gratuity.

the boy's hand, and Mirza could hardly take his eyes off the treasure.

"Your kindness is exceedingly great," Mirza Kabul responded very politely. No one knew better than he that the smooth round bones of the goat's joints made the best marbles. Almost every day, Ali Hassan had stopped to interrogate him on his school work, but this was the first time he had given more than a penny as a reward for the lad's studious efforts. "No doubt that is the reason he is so generously presenting me with the four *ashogs*," he thought to himself.

"Begone, or you will have no play until you must take the buffalos to the spring," the man nodded a dismissal.

Mirza needed no second bidding, but it wasn't because he was looking forward to driving the horses and the buffalos, not even his own young white buffalo for water, that made his feet fairly fly along the narrow, sandy street to his home, the *ashogs* clicking pleasantly in his pocket with every leap. On reaching the house the boy discovered that his mother had just filled a basket with stuffed dates, which he loved, and without waiting

to ask if he wished to have some, she dropped half a dozen of the fattest into a homemade paper bag, and again the boy felt as if it was wonderful to be alive and he was one of the world's favorites.

Eagerly his white teeth bit into the biggest date, then he munched contentedly for several minutes while his mother proceeded about her household duties, which were many, for Mirza was the youngest of five boys and two girls, so she could give little special attention to any one of them as long as they were well and did their school work with credit. The sight of the lucious dates quite drove from Mirza's mind the matter which had caused him to rush off ahead of his fellows when the master had finally released them for the day, but now his thoughts went back to it. He had two dates left, so resolutely closing the bag, he hastened to the top of the house, and presently was hurrying with both speed and caution across the roofs of other homes. At last he reached one which was vacant, and at the further end he stopped, peeked down into a delightful garden, where he saw a charming little girl,

with gentle hazel eyes, playing among the roses. Watching until she was near the wall which concealed him, Mirza tossed down the bag containing the two remaining dates, then ducked his head quickly, hardly daring to breath lest his audacity should be discovered.

From the path below he could hear the happy exclamation of the child, who had lost no time in discovering the dainty, and, in fact, it was not the first afternoon that some such treasure had dropped mysteriously to her feet. Only the day before it had been *nokhols* Mirza had shared with her, and although no Persian boy would be guilty of speaking to a little Persian girl, Monna had eaten the candy, as she now ate the dates, so he must surely know that she enjoyed them.

"This is empty—" It was a school fellow's voice, and swiftly Mirza dodged along the wall, coming to the opposite side of the building, where he strode out carelessly to join his fellows. "Have you got your top?"

"Yes—no," Mirza replied in confusion.

"Then why did you come here?" demanded Hosein indignantly.

"Perhaps he is looking into the garden of the Vezier for a glimpse of Monna," taunted Abdullah Voem. "Some day, like Gule Hosein, he will stretch his neck so far he wil fall from the bridge and the water will carry off his sheep-skin hat, and he will have to go bare-headed through the village—"

"Cease your foolishness, Abdullah," interposed one of the boys, "Would Mirza Kabul do such stupidness as that? Of course he would not and he would not speak to the little girl for he well knows it would only make trouble between his family and hers."

"I know, I was only teasing Mirza. He did look at her when she came this morning to the spring with her sister; but we all did that, every one of us," the lad answered, then added. "If you did not bring your top, I have two, and good cords; you may use which one you wish," he offered generously, and Mirza accepted; glad that the affair was dismissed so readily.

Then began a glorious game on the roof of the empty house. Tops spun and whirred through the air, their tips striking daintily as they whirled so fast and so long that their

sharp points bored tiny holes, some of them all the way through the thin material. At such times the boys calmly scrapped their feet over the spots and moved to sections which were less worn.

"It is good no one will live here," one chuckled.

"Will it be so good when the roof is discovered to leak?" added another softly.

No one bothered to answer anything of so little importance. In the course of the playing a number of other boys joined the little group, they too brought tops, and at last tiring of the game, they naturally started wrestling, for every boy in Persia aspires to be a great wrestler and perhaps show his strength and skill before the Shah*, who had been known to referee many a match and thoroughly enjoy himself in the doing. Once in the jumping about, a boy nearly knocked Mirza's hat off, but it was quickly restored to its place, with extremely polite apologies, for knocking off a hat was considered a great insult and no one did such a thing deliberately unless he was prepared to take a sound

*Title of the sovereign of Persia.

beating for his impudence. Peace again restored, the group broke up, until only a few remained in the cool evening.

Young Mirza would have liked to have the place to himself for a minute so he could glance once again into the beautiful garden, but there was no excuse he could offer to his fellows, so he hastened with them across the roofs until at last they had dived down into their own homes. But Mirza did not go in immediately. Instead he crept back, kept well in the shadows, and made his way like a dark spirit to the empty house. He was slipping along stealthily, when suddenly he saw that he was not alone, and in a moment he made out the tall bent figure of an old man who was apparently as anxious to be unseen as the boy himself. The man was near the further wall, and after waiting as long as he dared, the lad tip-toed back to his house, wondering greatly who the stranger might be, and why he should have chosen the roof of the empty dwelling.

That night the boy's dreams were of games, singing tops as big as houses, and he thought he was hanging onto the tip of one

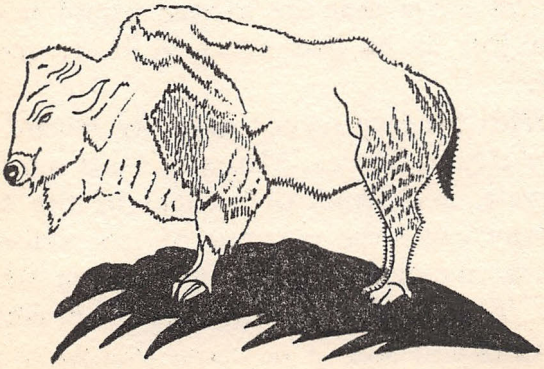
as it whirled madly into a beautiful garden of roses where a little girl sat eating stuffed dates. Then his mind took him to the school and the master, a giant who rapped him on the knuckles because he was inattentive to his studies. After that they tied his bare feet to a board and were going to bastinado* him severely, but the nightmare passed and he woke to find that it was time to get up, and he discovered that he had twisted his feet in the bed coverings so that they were cold and stiff.

"I'm glad that was only a dream," he whispered gratefully, and he resolved that he would pay the strictest attention to his lessons, for he knew that the master would punish him just as he had dreamed if he should fail.

With his face turned devoutly toward the holy city of Mecca, Mirza said his morning prayers, and from all sections of the community came the murmur of low voices as the words were repeated by the true believers. That finished, the lad had his breakfast,

*An Oriental mode of punishment consisting in beating an offender upon the soles of his feet.

then hastened, for he could tell by the sun that the hours were flying, to the long sheds where the cattle were beginning to stamp impatiently, and presently the boy leaped joyfully upon the back of his own young male buffalo that he had trained ever since his father gave him the comical looking little calf for his very own as long as he cared for it properly. There had been no question of ownership from that first minute, for the boy had devoted himself to the loved pet; had taken him daily for water and a bath, so that his white coat was always spotless, and every lad in Urumiah gazed upon him with admiration and no small amount of envy.



Th trained white buffalo.

This morning, Mirza rode the young buffalo as if he were a horse, guiding the beast with his knees and an occasional called direction as the rest of his father's stock were driven toward the brook. Already half a dozen other boys were attending to a similar task but less grandly mounted, and across the narrow stream numerous young girls filled their earthenware crocks with the clear water. Mirza's eyes swept them swiftly and a bit scornfully, but out of one corner he watched the path which led toward the home of the Vezier, and presently he was rewarded with a sight of the women who came leisurely forward. Close to one of them was a smaller child with soft hazel eyes that danced happily as she proudly bore her own small jug, for it was only recently that little Monna had been permitted to share in this grown-up task and she was filled with joy at the privilege.

At sight of the child, Mirza lifted his voice in a jubilant shout, urged his buffalo nearer the water, then, because he could think of nothing better to do, he placed his feet on his mount's broad back and stood up-

right, his arms outstretched. The Buffalo lowered his head to drink, but the lad maintained his position, then some of the girls began to giggle.

"O see the boy stand up," cried Monna happily. Of course Mirza heard the voice, and for her special entertainment, he proceeded to put his head where his heels had been, and with his feet waving beautifully, his eyes watched the child on the other side of the stream, who showed her great appreciation by clapping her hands.

"Round and round, my pet," shouted the boy, and the buffalo, who had satisfied his thirst, gravely performed.

"Come away," urged one of the older girls who realized that this special stunt was being staged for their benefit. Her own jug and the little girl's was quickly filled, and the pair hurried back along the path until the trees hid them from sight. With the main part of his audience gone, Mirza's throat tightened, but he continued to go through the acrobats quite as if he were merely practicing and was not aware that anyone had come or gone.

"To home," he called finally, and the buffalo turned obediently, nosed their charges and started toward the sheds. Once away from the water, Mirza righted himself. He felt a little disheartened, but then he recalled that Monna had really noticed him so he was compensated for his efforts. "Big girls are a bother," he told himself scornfully. At last the morning task was finished and the boy prepared for school, which was called at no regular hour, but when the master fancied. Then he would strike the great wooden school board with his *tokhokh* (hammer) several resounding cracks which brought the scholars on the run.

"Today the girls must help me with the cheeses," said Mirza's mother, "so I wish you to leave the buffalo milk with the servant of the Vizier. His home is on your way, *Azizim* (beloved)."

The boy accepted the task without objection, although it rightfully, according to Persian custom, belonged to his sisters. Taking the skin container he hurried off and in good time arrived at his destination, where he slackened his speed to a more dignified

pace and made his way to the rear of the house, which over-looked a part of the rose garden. Swiftly the lad's eyes traveled along the lovely paths, but this time no little girl played among the flowers. However, he could hear her laughing from another section so was content. He had no difficulty finding the servant, but he had to wait, for the woman was busy talking with a very tall, very old man who had a beautiful rug folded on his arm.

"Eleven years took my wife to create this rug," the old man was saying softly, as he opened it wider. Mirza saw the wonderful piece of work, made of the softest *abresein* (silk), the yarn had been dyed with colors extracted from herbs and beef, and the design was so intricate it might have been made by the hands of a genii.

"It is beautiful," the servant admitted with great admiration.

"Every knot is tied by the fingers of my daughter and it was blessed by the Mullah* in the name of Allah the Merciful," the old man went on in his sing-song tones.

*An expounder of the doctrine and dogmas of Islam.

"Not until the Barnazan day is over can I show it to the master," the servant declared. "If you will leave it, or return with it after sundown, I am sure he will be delighted to examine it, for only yesterday his favorite wife expressed a desire for a fine rug, but no true believer will consider a purchase until this day is over."

"I will leave it with you," the old man agreed," and return when the sun has gone down and the festival of night is descending upon us."

"That will be well." The woman took the precious piece of weaving, handled it carefully while the old man's eyes lingered on the work of his wife's hands as if reluctant to part with it. Finally, with a little sigh, he turned to go. "Rest you," she invited hospitably, "and be refreshed." An order was given to a slave, who took the old man toward the garden, and as he hobbled away, Mirza's eyes followed him thoughtfully. There was something oddly familiar about the figure, but just then the servant interrupted his thoughts. "You have brought the milk, Mirza Kabul!"

"It is here." He gave her the container, and just at that moment the clatter of the school master's *tokhokh* drowned all other sounds and drove out all other thoughts.

Swift as a young deer the lad ran to the Mosque and presently he was seated on a mat on the floor with his fellow students in a circle about the master, who had a long staff close to his hand ready for most effective use on any boy whose attention lagged. Then began the drone of audible study as the tasks of the day were started and Mirza wished heartily that it was nearer the close than the opening of the session. He consoled himself somewhat with the knowledge that soon the school would be over for the year, and they would enjoy the party in May—"

"Mirza!"

He barely escaped a rap from the staff, then recalling his dream of the night before, the boy applied himself with determination to his work. Against one side of the wall stood the board to which feet of the unruly were tied, and Mirza liked running

about on his own too well to risk having their soles beaten until he could not even hobble.

Slowly the hours dragged until it seemed as if the master would never release his young charges, and as the afternoon passed more than once the long staff beat a sharp tattoo close to legs of a student whose minds lagged. With grave determination, Mirza applied himself to his studies, droning over and over the verses of the Koran, varied by the long poem he must learn. The subject was a youth whose life was filled with adventure, daring deeds achieved with lance and spear from the back of a marvelous charger. Mechanically repeating the words, young Kabul's mind indulged in flights of fancy and he pictured himself crowned a hero, but his feats were accomplished with the help of his loved white buffalo, who was as strong as a camel and as fleet as a horse.

The boy's truant thoughts finally lingered in the rose garden where Monna played, and in his imagination he could see her applauding his efforts. With those things claiming his attention, he recalled the morning's visit to the brook for water, and later the stop

with buffalo milk. This naturally made him remember the ancient rug merchant who hoped to sell his wife's beautiful work to the Vizier, who would pay well for the exquisite piece of weaving. Then, suddenly Mirza's back straightened and his lids narrowed, for now into his mind came the recollection of the evening before on the roof of the empty house where they had played with tops, and later, hoping to catch a last glimpse of Monna, the boy had been compelled to leave because of the mysterious stranger who lingered there.

"It was that old man," he declared aloud, then glanced fearfully toward the master, but his strange words had passed unnoted. Realizing that such a breach of discipline might have won him a sharp slap if nothing worse, he applied himself again to his task, but through it all he kept wondering why that old man had been there. Why he had waited until Barnazan; the day when no true believer would buy or sell, instead of offering his ware the day before, when the transaction might have been finished. It was a very puzzling matter, but Mirza could find

no solution to it, and so dismissed it as one of the many hard-to-understand vagaries indulged in by grown-ups.

"You may depart—" Instantly they were all on their feet, the ceremony of leave-taking gone through gravely, for no lad wanted to be held over because of disrespect. Presently they filed out into the declining sun-light, and filled their lungs with deep breaths of relief at being free. With wondering eyes, Mirza stared toward the Kurdish mountains, whose foothills showed delicate blue in the deepening shadows, and the boy knew that the wild hyacinths were blossoming at their best. He was sure the rug merchant had come from beyond one of those great passes and again he tried to understand why the man should have waited for the sacred day.

"Come with us to the meadow and we will play *borkum topa*," urged one of the boys.

"I will come," Mirza agreed promptly, for he wore only a silk fez which was too soft for the hat game, so it would be quite safe.

The last time he had played, his best stiff one had been selected and when he finally

made his way homeward, it was a wreck and his parents had forbidden him to play again, or else wear the headgear which could not be spoiled. Gaily the group raced to a nearby field, sides were selected, and quickly a ring was drawn into which a good, skin covered hat was tossed, after its owner had been solemnly assured it would not suffer, but presently, in spite of the best defense he and his partners could put up to protect it, the headgear was being kicked furiously by the opposition. It wasn't until strains of music reached the players' ears that they lost interest in the game.

"That is blind Ashag; there must be a wedding," one exclaimed.

"Let's see where he is going," proposed another. It was the lad whose hat was threatened with destruction, but luckily the boys were weary of playing, so they raced back toward the village.

"I see him!" The old singer was seated on a donkey and as he rode along, his voice was lifted melodiously.

"He knows so many songs he could sing

three days without repeating one the second time. I have heard my father say so."

"Perhaps it is just the evening festival. Other players are with him," Mirza announced, and sure enough the boy could see a group following the ancient warbler, and they carried violins, mandolins and guitars under their arms as if they were to take a part in some big celebration. Slowly they made their way through the village, the children close at their heels, and at last some of the musicians unwrapped their instruments and played as they proceeded.

"When I grow up I shall be a violinist," proclaimed Hosein, but Mirza looked at him a bit scornfully.

"It is a worthy calling but where will you get your violin?"

"Even now my uncle has given me one he got from the Kurds and it is very fine, worth much money," Hosein replied loftily.

"In the Americas, I have heard that violinists are well paid and no one scorns them—"

But at that moment the music stopped, except the singer, who could not see the servant running from the house of the Vizier.

The woman looked as if she was distracted, and then from the gardens rose a wild lament. It sounded as if half the women in the world were wailing because of hearts wrung with grief.

"What can ail them?" Hosein demanded wonderingly. Then the blind singer was approached and he to paused right in the middle of a note, as if what he had heard had choked him.

"You are wanted by your mother, Mirza," a neighbor called, so young Kabul raced home without learning what was the matter.

"Would you never come for a meal, *Azizim*?" she demanded, but not too impatiently.

"We were playing *borkum topa* and heard the musicians," he started to explain.

"And it is well that your hat was not suitable for the game. It is great sport, my lad, but wicked to play—"

"Oh, it is an old game," the elder Kabul put in quickly.

"But it need not be played with the good stiff hats," his mother insisted. "Also it is very rough. Go, my son. Like the pig's

looks your face, so the hat must have suffered."

Obediently Mirza went to clean himself and as he glanced at his long, full trousers he saw that they too looked as if the game had been a particularly strenuous one. At last he was presentable, and returned to the family. Silently he sat while the meal was consumed, but his thoughts were full of wonder over the strange behavior of the Vizier's servant and he wished he knew what had happened to cause the women to make such a commotion.

"I heard lamenting—" he started to say, but just then a neighbor came running to the house, and the elder Kabuls hastened to know what had happened.

"It is terrible," the woman declared excitedly.

"What is terrible?"

"Allah be merciful," came the answer.

"Allah is merciful," they reminded her quickly.

"Even so."

"What is causing you such distress?"

"The child, the child of the Vizier—"

"Has the evil eye afflicted the child?" Mirza's mother asked anxiously. "Only this morning they were all at the spring—"

"It is indeed an evil eye," the woman wailed, then she threw her aprons over her head and moaned. "Such a dreadful thing."

"Which child is it?" Mirza ventured to ask.

"The girl—"

"The little girl—" He could hardly get the words out.

"It is Monna."

"Allah be merciful. What happened to the child?" Then they could hear plainly the same wailing noise that the boy had heard coming from the rose garden.

"The news is spreading over the village—"

"Woman, tell us what is the matter—has the evil spirit afflicted the little one badly?"

"How can we know—"

"I will find out what has happened." The man of the house put on his hat and hastened outside to make his inquiries of more coherent neighbors, while Mirza's mother urged the woman to have a drink of coffee and pull herself together.

"Tell us, I beg of you, what has happened?"

"The child has been stolen."

"Stolen!" They could hardly believe their ears.

"How could she be stolen; every instant she is guarded?"

"Even so, she is gone, and the wicked one left a message that she is to be taken to the mountains and they are going to teach her to be a great weaver of rugs. Never again will she be permitted to return to her home."

"Allah, Allah. Why was such a thing done?"

"It is vengeance, vengeance for an evil committed long ago."

CHAPTER II

In the Mountains

Mirza, as well as his mother listened with horror to the news that Monna, the youngest and loveliest daughter of the Vizier had been spirited away from her father's gardens, almost from under the eyes of half a dozen servants.

"Tell us, do they know who took the child?"

"Yes, they know," the neighbor replied. "Yesterday morning there came a man from the hills with a beautiful rug which he offered for sale. He told the servant that his wife had woven it, and it was indeed a marvelous piece of work."

"I saw it," Mirza put in breathlessly. "I saw the man, he was very old and bent. He told them it took his daughter ten months to tie the knots, and his wife worked eleven years to weave the design."

"That is what is repeated."

"How could he have taken the child?"

"Because of the day, the servant explained she could not show it to her master, but the old man agreed to leave it until sundown when it could be shown. She gave him refreshments and he lingered in the garden, resting until evening."

"Where Monna played?"

"Yes, even so. She ran around the paths, past him many times, then when the sun was sinking, the servant went to fetch the rug, but she could not find it. The loss created much disturbance for it had been entrusted to a slave, who had placed it with great care in a long box, but it was nowhere to be found. Everyone searched frantically, then went to find the old man, but he too had disappeared. They decided he might have changed his mind about selling it because

he seemed greatly attached to it, and had managed to take it away without being seen."

"That might have been done."

"They gave up the search, then, suddenly they missed Monna, and no one could find her. The last the servant saw of her she was at the far side of the garden near the empty house, but there was no trace of her."

"Allah, Allah, Allah. And how did they come to think the rug seller took her?"

"A message they found which he left. He said, like this: 'The years have been long in the living, short in the eyes of Allah. A lifetime is but a brief span; for the life of my daughter yours I have taken. In the place of my daughter, yours shall hence forth tie the knots of the wonderful rugs, and she shall learn to weave them; she shall care for us in our old age when our eyes no longer see the slight difference of the shades, and our fingers have lost their cunning in the weaving;' that is what he wrote in the language of the Prophet."

"Allah—"

The Kurd who kidnapped the Princess.

"What did the old man mean by Monna's life for his daughter's?" questioned Mirza.

"'Tis of long ago, almost a life-time," the neighbor answered.

"Yes, a life-time," repeated the boy's mother.

"Today the Vizier is rich and respected

because of his office," the neighbor spoke softly, as if it was not well to discuss such matters except in whispers, "but the span of a life-time he was young, a powerful man in build and position, and he accumulated great wealth. His horsemen used to ride with him like the hot wind across the desert, their mounts' hoofs scattering the sand into a cloud, like a cyclone, and when they returned, always they kept their lips closed regarding those hours of the night." She paused impressively.

"Yes," Mirza urged eagerly.

"There were many tales told of caravans, rich ones, which never reached their destination, vast treasure which its true owner never laid eyes on, beautiful slaves scattered and dispersed in far away markets without hope of ever seeing their families again. So great was the depredation wrought that the Shah sent his own men out to capture the bandits, but always they returned and reported their failure."

"But surely our Vizier could not have been so wicked," Mirza interposed. It was

hard to believe that the father of such a charming little girl could ever have lived anything but a most exemplary life.

"He was young and ambitious, and his band grew; grew until their number was legion. Then, one day to the Shah went a young man who had escaped from the marauders. He told of his experience; that with his young bride he was enroute to visit the land of his father. The caravan halted on protected territory beside a cool river, but before dawn came, the sand of the desert rose in a cloud, the caravan was surrounded, he was left for dead, and his young wife who had been taught by her father the fine art of weaving, had been spirited away. He described the men, their horses and their manners. Men went with him to search, but they found only the body of the daughter, who had escaped from her captors and died of thirst—"

"Indeed it was dreadful!"

"The father, too, took up the search for her murderers, then he adopted an infant of his own tribe, bringing her up to weave the famous rugs of Persia. The man grew old,

he never talked, and only once did anyone hear him speak of the affair, then it was to say that he constantly prayed that it would be Allah's will that his might be the hand that avenged the death of his daughter."

"Our Vizier is—"

"He has been given a great position and no more do the riders race the winds of night, but today his favorite child, Monna, has disappeared only a few hours after the appearance of an ancient weaver with a rug for which every true Persian would trade his horse; also is gone the old man and the rug."

"I saw him on the roof of the empty house," Mirza suddenly remembered, and although he did not go into the detail of why he, himself, was there alone, he was emphatic in his belief that he had seen the old man and that he had been puzzled because he had not taken the rug to show at once when it could have been bargained for.

"We will search the empty dwelling," announced Mirza's father, who had entered and heard his son's recital.

"May I accompany you?" the lad pleaded.

"You would know him, so you may come."

Quickly a small company was assembled and they hurried to the house, whose roof was perforated with holes bored by the tops of the lads who had played there, but although a thorough search was made of the premises, there was no sign of the child or of her captor. However, the men agreed that she might have been persuaded to step inside for a moment and when no servants were watching, been carried swiftly away.

"The old weaver is not without justification," declared one of the searchers, "but to Allah alone belongs revenge." Sadly they left the premises, and then started a great band of horsemen and men on foot, who set forth grimly to find the little girl and fetch her back to her sorrowing parents.

"You must retire, my son," Mirza's mother was insistant and the lad obeyed, although all night he tossed restlessly, dozing occasionally and waking at every sound. Several times he heard the pounding of hoofs as weary riders returned after fruitless search, and many times he heard a question asked, but always the answer was the same.

"We found no trace." Over and over the few words were repeated until it seemed as if they burned in the lad's brain and he longed to be out with the searchers. Morning came at last and with it the announcement that the schoolmaster was to join the hunters, so the boys would have a holiday.

"May I not ride with you my father?" Mirza begged.

"It is no mission for a lad. Today you have a holiday, make the most of the gift of Allah, for always to some He sends sadness, while the same event brings joy to another. Allah be praised. Only Allah is Great."

"Only Allah is great," the boy repeated obediently, for the first time in his life he regretted the fact he could have a holiday. It was difficult to believe that he could possibly prefer to spend the day in the Mosque droning lessons while the master's long staff lay ready to crack over his feet if he failed in the responses. Sadly he went for the cattle, drove them to drink; but today he did no stunts on the broad back of his buffalo for there was no little girl to applaud his efforts.

Perhaps he would never see her again in the rose garden, or with the women of her father's family on the roof where the cool breezes tossed her dark curls. Manfully he clenched his fists, then, suddenly he stared thoughtfully at his white buffalo. Just then two of his pals came to the brook.

"Let us ride in search of the daughter of the Vizier," he proposed and the boys looked at him quickly.

"What chance have boys when the men have been unable to locate her?" Abdullah Voem objected.

"I have only a mule for my father has taken the horse," added Hosein.

"Because we are boys Allah may lead us directly to the girl, and with a mule none would be suspicious," Mirza replied.

"If my mother allows me," Hosein agreed.

The boys met later, Mirza mounted on the white buffalo while his two companions were astride rather sorry looking mules. Their mothers had given them a lunch in their knapsacks, but each had admonished her son to keep well away from the passes.

"Let us ride in search of the Princess."

"The old weaver did not go through the mountains without help and enemies may be stationed all along the route to fight or turn hunters back," Mirza's mother had added her protest. "Cease to think of finding the child when every man in the village is searching. Go, as your father bade you and thank Allah for His blessing. If, by any chance you should get trace of the missing child, ride back for the men." A bit discouraged at such instructions the boys set out but

they felt that their mission was bound to be worse than a failure.

"With all the men of the village away how can we fetch them should we be so fortunate as to run across trace of the little girl?" Hosein grumbled.

"And with mules, by the time we returned with men, if we could find any, the trace would be lost," added Abdullah.

"Let us be content with a picnic and games in the hills back of the spring," Hosein suggested. "My uncle showed me two new tricks in wrestling which are wonderful and I will teach them to you."

"When you set your eyes on the height, even though it be high, let not your glance wander or your heart be eaten with discouragement," said Mirza. "I set out to seek Monna, the daughter of the Vizier, although he richly deserves the suffering Allah has put upon him, and I shall not turn away."

"I will accompany you but your buffalo will have to accommodate his pace to my mule's or you will leave us far behind," Hosein replied.

"And I," Abdullah added.

"Let us ride together to where the hills begin to rise then we will decide what to do next. An idea may come to us," Mirza answered.

That plan was accepted and the three rode slowly forward, the white buffalo, who liked a good run, occasionally pranced to express his desire, but his young master merely soothed and coaxed him to maintain the slower speed, promising that later he might run to his heart's content. Whether the animal understood or not no one could tell, but he proceeded with calm dignity quite as if he had no wish to do anything more than go forward at little better than a walk. At last the party reached the edge of the foothills and resolutely turned their mounts' heads away from the great pass and proceeded until they came into a ravine where they often played or gathered wild fruit.

"Now, let us consider," Mirza proposed.

"I have been thinking every minute, but no plan is in my mind," said Abdullah.

"There is none in mine," added Hosein.

"I have thought of one which is little bet-

ter than nothing," Mirza told them, but his tone wasn't very hopeful.

"What is it?"

"The buffalo longs to go swiftly. Suppose I let him have his head and run. I will go toward the quartz cliffs laid bare by the wind storms, and you who both know the way, follow in my tracks as quickly as you can. All of us shall watch in every direction we can and if I see anything between here and the quartz cliffs I will ride back for you. If I see nothing, I will wait for you there. If either of you see anything, ride more quickly to overtake me."

"It isn't such a bad idea," Hosein nodded agreement.

"If we were only in a place to which the little girl might have been taken, it would be an excellent idea," said Abdullah.

"Anyway, it will be like playing a new sort of game."

"Very well, I go."

Mirza rode off on his white buffalo and was soon out of sight of his companions. The beast thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of

making greater speed, and ran swift as a horse. Although his young master's eyes were alert for a sign of the missing child, he did not forget to watch carefully so that his mount did not go too fast over the rough places, or wind himself when they had to make a descent. On and on they went, and if the mission had not been such a sad one, they both would have enjoyed the adventure hugely, but the buffalo showed his delight by occasionally tossing up his great head and bellowing. The cry was taken up by the echoes and passed back and forth until it sounded like the clamoring of a half dozen beasts instead of one.

"Perhaps beloved," Mirza said softly, "you had better not roar to the whole world that we approach. Someone may hear us and take flight."

After that they went on with only the crack of the sharp hoofs on rough stone, or the softer thud when the route led over less hard substances.

The pair had traveled over an hour when they came within sight of the cliffs, which

rose sharply against the morning sky in the distance. Not a sign of a child, an old weaver, or possible escort had been seen; not a track of man or beast revealed the trail of a traveler of any kind. Mirza was beginning to think that he had not chosen wisely when he had suggested this route for the search, but inasmuch as they were not permitted to ride near the passes it was about the only thing left. In the other direction lay a wide waste of sand which men did not enter for any purpose whatever, for it took them away from any kind of stream, and even though they might carry water, it was a dangerous undertaking which would land them at a spot where the mountains rose abruptly, like giant walls and no one could possibly go further.

"If the old man has been thinking for a long time about having his revenge he will know the futility of taking that route," Mirza assured himself. "Hasten, my loved one."

They had reached a high plateau, level and easy to traverse, so the lad sent the buffalo racing across it. He knew that at the

other side there was a strip of forest, a stream which rose far back in the mountains, and a short way further the granite cliffs, whose lofty peaks glistened in the sunshine as if they were set with jewels. Toward this goal he proceeded, in due time reached the water where he paused to quench his thirst, then remounting, he went on. Finally they were almost through the stretch of timber land and then he bethought himself to go more slowly.

"Hasten no more for the present," he said softly. The pace was cut down at once and the great beast went so carefully that his feet hardly made a sound. Once or twice he lifted his head for a good bellow, but a word from his master silenced his challenge. They were almost through the woods when the lad's sharp ear caught an odd sound and the pair paused to listen intently. After several seconds he made out that it came from around the nearest cliff, which was broken into a series of small ravines.

"Wait here quietly and if anyone molests you, then you may roar."

Mirza slipped from his perch, dropped

low and after glancing back to be sure that the white coat of his pet was not in plain sight, he crouched and wriggled his way until he was at the further end of the nearest ravine. Glancing about he was positive that his movements were not observed, then he proceeded to climb a tree. High in its branches at last he could see over, and his heart almost stopped beating, for there were two small tents pitched. They were so nearly the color of their surroundings that a less keen observer might have passed them by without being aware of their presence.

Close to the back of the tents was a narrow opening in the rocks, and in front of the pair of tiny abodes stood a tall young man in the garments of an Arab. He was smoking a long cigarette, whose smoke he directed toward the earth, and close to his hand stood a long rifle. His cloak was dark colored with a wide belt and two smaller, but no less deadly guns were poked in his belt in such a way that they could be quickly brought into use. He seemed to be listening, then he sauntered toward the wide opening of the ravine and a moment later Mirza could see

him leaning against the cliff. His back was to the lad, who knew the locality well, for they had played robber's cave in it frequently. Mirza recalled a wide stretch of table land which sloped toward an ancient, and rarely used roadway.

Just then the sound of a child's voice reached the ear of the lad in the tree, and the soothing response of an older person, undoubtedly a man. With a heart beating like a trip hammer Mirza listened, and then the guard returned to the tent.

"Seek rest, my father, and worry not about the child. I will keep watch while you sleep. Fear not for we are safe and when the searchers give up the hunt, we shall proceed and our mission shall have been accomplished." The old voice replied, but Mirza could not make out the words, but the fact that the old man was going to sleep set his mind to working.

"Only Allah is great," he whispered. He lingered until he saw the younger chap return to the wide entrance, then scrambling down stealthily, the boy made his way with

great caution back to his buffalo. He mounted quickly, turned the beast's head, and urging him forward, started back by the way they had come. By the stream he saw the two boys, who had just quenched their own thirst, and he called to them softly, lest the breeze betray their presence.

"We didn't see a thing. Did you?" Hosein whispered.

"Yes. Allah has indeed led us rightly." He proceeded to tell what he had seen and his companions listened in breathless interest.

"If we go back for help it will be night," Abdullah remarked.

"I know it. I have a plan."

"Hurry and tell us."

"You get on your mules and ride to the old road, then get off and go on foot until you reach the slope. Take the basket and pick some wild flowers. When you get near the spot, start to argue about who is the better wrestler. Perhaps the young man will come to see who you are and you may be able to detain him. I will go back, slip through the little opening, see if I can attract the attention of the little girl, and coax her away.

After we are mounted, I will call like a bird and then you will know that with me all is well."

"That is a good plan," Hosein agreed quickly.

"If you fail, they will take flight," Abdullah reminded them.

"Let us try anyway," Hosein urged.

"All right." A few more hasty directions and suggestions, then Mirza rode the buffalo back and further along the ledge until he was almost to the tree he had climbed. Here he dismounted carefully, and paused to listen. Presently he heard a familiar whistle, and a moment later, could hear the voices of his two companions as if they were having a very heated argument; a battle was sure to follow such a dispute.

Slipping forward into the opening and lying flat on his stomach, Mirza wriggled around the larger tent. He could see the guard hasten toward the wide entrance, his gun in his hand, and a moment later the man disappeared. Stealthily lifting one edge of the tent the boy put his eye to the opening, and in a moment the blackness became less

dense. He could see the child sitting disconsolately in the middle of the abode, while an old man was stretched sound asleep by the opening. He had taken that position so that if the little girl attempted to get out, she would awaken him. For a moment Mirza did not know what to do next. He hardly dared breath, but at last he managed to make a little scraping noise and Monna looked toward him. Placing his fingers to his lips hastily, lest she speak to him, he beckoned.

Quickly the child glanced at the sleeper, then after a moment's hesitation, she wriggled among the piles of soft cushions until she was close to Mirza. Trembling with excitement he drew her down as low as he could get her, and then, without making a sound, she rolled under the tent and was on the outside.

"Sshh," he warned softly. She gave him her soft little hand, which he took in his own brown and dirty one, then crouching low they stepped as fast as they dared toward the rear entrance. They could hear the two boys making a great commotion in the front and occasionally the young man's voice inter-

rupted, as if trying to settle a very heated dispute.

At last the two were outside on the ledge, and here they went on a bit faster, being mighty careful that their feet did not disturb so much as a pebble in the going. It seemed a long time before they reached the buffalo, who was patiently waiting for his master's return. If he was surprised at the pair, he showed no displeasure, but permitted the lad to lift the little girl up, then leap behind her. Heels urged a bit of speed, but by that time there was quite a scuffling in front, which meant that the two boys were fighting. Probably the guard was refereeing the battle.

"Hasten, my beloved," whispered Mirza. "Hasten with caution."

The beast needed no second urging but proceeded at a quick pace toward the woods and presently they were riding among the trees. Monna clutched the long hair of the buffalo with both hands, while Mirza kept his arms protectingly around her. In the forest they quickened their speed, and then the boy remembered that he had promised to bird-call

to his pals. He rounded his lips and emitted a fine imitation, but only one, lest the men at the ravine take alarm or get suspicious and investigate.

"Swift, like the wind," said the lad and the buffalo responded eagerly. At first Monna gasped a bit fearfully, but soon her terror was changed to delight, and she giggled happily at the odd pair of rescuers. After they had ridden an hour she no longer hung on with her hands but managed to sit upright. She was thoroughly enjoying the experience, and finally they came to the edge of the foothills and started across the flat stretch of plain.

"We are almost home," Monna sighed happily, but Mirza did not reply. He was thinking of something very serious and his heart hammered fearfully against his ribs. Just then they saw a great cloud of dust, and slacking the speed of their mount, the boy scowled in wonder, but at that moment, Monna recognized one of the horsemen charging toward them. "It is my father," she announced.

"Stop," Mirza ordered his steed, then he

slipped off the beast's back. "Take her on," he ordered. The buffalo obeyed without question while Mirza stood uncertainly where he had dropped. He wanted to run away, but decided against anything so foolish. Resolutely he walked in the direction of his own home, and presently two of the horsemen dashed up to him.

"Come, we will give you a ride in," one said briskly.

"Why did you leave her?" asked the other. He reached down and boosted Mirza up beside him, but the lad said nothing. He wished heartily that he was at home.

"Hosein and Abdullah cut across and met some of the searchers on the road. They said you had found Monna, so we came back and started to meet you. It was not very gallant to dismount and leave the young lady."

But still Mirza remained as dumb as an oyster.

It wasn't until they were in the village and he saw his own father and mother, with faces beaming proudly, that he opened his lips.

"I—I had to talk to her," he stammered.

"I—I didn't say much, only told her to keep still."

"Ha, ha," laughed his father.

"Of course you had to speak to her." His mother smiled, and seemed to think that his conduct was above reproach.

"Won't her father be angry?"

"Be angry, me, why lad—Oh, I see. You are very polite, my boy, and let me tell you that your family and my family, from this day forth, are friends. Your father and I will take the pledge of friendship, which shall never be forgotten, and it will never be broken. Allah be praised."

"Allah alone is great," sighed Mirza with relief.

"Furthermore, guardian of my little daughter, you shall come into the rose garden and play with her," added the Vizier, and with that Mirza's eyes danced happily.

"But Hosein and Abdullah helped," he reminded the big man.

"That I know, and for a reward they have both chosen horses," he laughed heartily. Then he was placed in one of the saddles and taken to his own home, where his brothers

and sisters treated him with great respect, instead of like a little brother, and after that there was a party and the neighbors came in all evening, until the lad's lids closed, as if weights were on them.

"Did they get the old man?" he asked sleepily, when his father had carried him to bed.

"The Vizier permitted them to go back to their own land."

"Allah is—Allah—" and his eyes closed tightly.

THE END

PART II

HUNGARY AND RUMANIA

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THE LITTLE DRUMMER

CHAPTER I

Invasion.

In one of the numerous deep valleys of the Carapathian Mountains of Hungary lies the picturesque village of Kapolna; the snow-capped range almost completely surrounding and protecting it from the cold and storms of the higher altitudes. Usually its broad acres yield abundant crops to the farmers when each one is able to cultivate all of his land, but now the harvest will be small for only a portion

of the fertile sections were planted in the spring. On the foothills sheep and cattle are grazing, all of them tended by young boys; here and there fields of corn and grain stand out like the squares on a checkerboard; while garden patches showing lack of sufficient attention surround each small, white house.

Over the village lingers an atmosphere of quiet, but it is not the peace which comes with contentment; rather the ominous stillness that broods over the countryside just before a storm or a great disaster, as if the world were anticipating trouble and holding its breath fearfully dreading the coming hours. In the center of the town stands the church, that haven of rest with its calm graveyard in which lie brave men of the land who will never again be disturbed by the call to arms, the thunder of guns, or the agony of shell-torn bodies. Very softly, as if their movements might precipitate some unseen calamity, half a dozen women, their white hair hidden under black kerchiefs, their backs bowed, walked down the road to the church, their eyes watching only the path beneath their feet as if they no longer dared to look up with

a joyous smile to meet the sunshine. A few tiny girls in stiffly starched dresses and hair in twin pig-tails, pattered gravely beside the women, who held the small hands with fingers that trembled lest the future drag the unconscious babies through years of pain and hardship.

"Lsuzsa Neiu (aunty)," piped one of them with a whimper, "where are we going?"

"To the church to pray, child," the woman answered mechanically. "To pray that the good Lord will bring back your father and my son, and everybody's son. To pray that this war—" But her voice trailed off as if she suddenly realized that she was saying too much to her little companion.

"But, Lsuzsa Neiu, my brother, Misi says he is going to run away to fight the Russians; that will end the war," the child spoke now with greater confidence.

"Thy brother is but fourteen—what could—"

"Who is but fourteen?" demanded a sturdy lad as he came rushing through a cross street and heard the words. Two other youngsters were with him, and their strong brown hands

showed that they had been doing work of absent men.

"You are," the little girl teased. The sight of her brother, who seemed to her to be big and capable of doing anything in the world, made her rosy lips part in a smile and her dark eyes dance.

"I know that, smarty," the lad retorted, "but I am big, and that is why Pista, Laczi and I are getting ready to go and finish the fighting."

"With paper drums and wooden swords?" asked one of the women making an effort to smile at the children standing so eagerly before her, but at that moment a shrill blast broke the stillness, there was a swishing, rushing noise, the roar of a motor and the rush of a high-powered car. "What is that, what is that!" whispered the frightened women. Their heads turned quickly in the direction of the commotion but all they were able to make out, was a great cloud of dust which rose in giant rolls in the roadway, and settled slowly over the clean little village, leaving it smudgy and grey.

"The Devil's carriage," answered the old-

est woman. "The devil is riding through Kapolna at high noon."

"We are marked for destruction," moaned another whose hands shook as they rested on the head of a heavy cane.

"The Lord have mercy—" They made the sign of the cross, but the three lads merely stared after the machine whose course they could follow as it raced toward the foot-hills.

"That is no Devil's carriage," Pista informed the little girl.

"It's a military automobile," added Misi.

"The teacher told us about them, and about airplanes. They are better than automobiles because they fly in the air like great eagles—"

"Fly?"

"Yes, with men in them, and guns, and bombs. Doesn't it tell it in the Priest's paper that he gets every week!" Misi explained, not a little proud that he had learned so much.

"Did you ever see one?" the little girl wanted to know.

"No," but I've seen pictures of them, and didn't the Holy Father say that it is true—"

"Come along," Misi interrupted impatiently. "We men must not dally with women

and children, there is work to do."

"And calves to water," his old aunt reminded him.

"That is so," replied Pista.

"Forward march!" ordered the young leader. Falling in line with true military precision, they made their way past the woman, on across the village, around the largest of the fields of grain, and through the grove of woods, which in happier days afforded the villagers a delightful picnic ground, and the lads no end of sport. Up toward the foothills they turned their faces and cutting diagonally through a meadow they leaped a small stream and finally came to a large pen where young calves were kept.

"Here we are, let down the bars," Pista shouted, but before the command could be carried out, they heard the thunder of hoofs, the clatter of musketry, creak of saddles and jangle of spurs.

"Is it our men?" Laczi asked quietly.

"I never heard them ride so," Misi answered.

"Let's hide in the shrubbery—" But before they could make a move, a company of horse-

men sprang into view. The leaders drew in their mounts, sat staring keenly about them, and finally spied the three lads a few rods away. One called something in a language none of the boys understood, so they made no move. Finally another hoseman, whose garments looked as if they might once have belonged to a Hungarian soldier, but were so worn, and covered with dust that it was difficult to tell to what national army they originally belonged, rode toward them. As he approached, four others kept close beside him and through Misi's mind flashed a thought that he must be a prisoner of the others. The five rode to where the lads were standing, as if turned to stone, and Misi noticed that the one's face was drawn and pale, his eyes were sunk deep in his head, and one sleeve hung empty. For a moment the sick man just stared without saying a word, then a sharp command from one of his companions made him draw a deep breath and with an effort he opened his lips.

"God guard you," he said mechanically and his voice sounded weak, as if he were nearly exhausted.

"And you," Misi responded gravely.

"What is your name, lad?"

"Miska Geczy is my name, sir," he replied, and his dark eyes met those of the stranger fearlessly.

"His Excellency desires to know the shortest route to the gorge of Stracena, Misa. Tell us who in this neighborhood can show us the way immediately. There is need of great haste," the man told him, and for an instant he closed his eyes as if the task or the effort to perform it were too great for him to bear. Misi glanced swiftly at the company, the splendid horses, the soldiers fully armed, and his brain began to work like a trip hammer. It was obvious to the lad that they were not Hungarians, nor Germans, nor Austrians. There could be but one answer to their nationality; they must be Russians, and Russians were enemies of Hungary. In a flash it occurred to the boy that the young man who was questioning him must be their prisoner and that they had brought him along so that he could talk for them.

"There is nobody in our village but very old men, women and children, sir," he an-

swered finally. "No one."

The young soldier turned to his nearest companion, spoke quickly and at length, but as they talked, the man called His Excellency rode up, his horse prancing impatiently, and his face dark with anger. He spoke up sharply to the interpreter, then fairly bellowed to the soldier, and finally shook his fist at the three boys. No one moved a muscle or uttered a word while he talked, and finally he finished and turned to the Hungarian, who bowed his head gravely, and turned to Misi.

"I am to inform you," he began painfully, "that he will not brook excuses or treachery. He says that you are slaves and should be loyal to your deliverers. He says that if you do not tell him at once the name of some one who can lead us to the Gorge immediately, that he will use the ranchuka (Cossack whip) on everyone in the place. You had better tell what he wants before he uses violence and destroys your village and crops."

"Yes, sir, I understand," Misi answered. "I myself will lead you. Tell him I know the way."

"I'll go along," Pista spoke up quickly.

"And I, and I," announced the others. They saw their own soldier's face get paler than ever, and he stared at them with horrified eyes, as if he had been praying that they would refuse or disclaim any knowledge of the short cut to the gorge.

"But one of us must go home and tell our mothers, and care for the calves," Misi objected.

"I won't," Laczi announced positively.

"All right, I will," Misi declared, and his companions looked at him in astonishment. "I will be the one who goes home."

"Good, you are oldest and can work better," Pista nodded, but he was wondering what plan in his friend's mind made him so willing to relinquish the honor of leading them.

"Sure, the women-folk need me," he told them. "You all know the short cut; the road of the Little Drummer—you have been on it many times," he said casually, and the three kept their eyes from meeting his.

"Of course. Didn't I drive sheep over the road of the Little Drummer only a week ago, and Pista with me?" Laczi replied.

At that point His Excellency interrupted again sharply, then the Hungarian explained what had been discussed. Finally he understood the arrangement, and his face became less ugly. He snapped out something and the Hungarian nodded, as the officers hand went threateningly to the holster he wore.

"It will go hard with you and yours if you do not obey," he told them. "You will have to go afoot, for there are no extra horses, so keep ahead as best you can."

"We understand," Pista replied.

"Soon the way is difficult and we can go as fast as your horse," Laczi said scornfuly, although it would, he thought, be grand to be in one of the wonderful saddles on a prancing steed.

"Then march, march!"

Misi watched the company, led by his own best pals, until they were out of sight, then he faced about, completely forgetting the thirsty calves, and made his way toward the grove. The moment he was sure that the soldiers could not possibly see or hear him, he broke into a run, his feet hardly touching the ground as he raced along as fast as they could carry

him. In taking a short cut through the under brush he stumbed twice and fell full length, but he sprang up quickly, and rushed on, his heart hammering with fear lest his plan fail.

Presently he was through the woods, and in front of him spread the largest grain field, golden and ripe almost ready for the sickles of the harvesters. All his life Misi had been told that to step on wheat was as much of a crime as it would be to trample through loaves of bread, and that the boy who did such a ruthless act on Judgment Day would find that he must answer for his wickedness. This was repeated so often that no peasant child would for an instant even think of putting his foot down on this blessing from God.

Now the boy stopped instinctively. To go to the road was a long detour which meant losing precious time, so he looked about eagerly for a footpath, but none was visible and he could have cried with disappointment and anxiety.

"The Lord forgive our sins," he prayed, then making the sign of the cross, plunged into the field. Try as he would, his thick

boots broke the dry straw and he could not help leaving a broken line of trampled grain in his wake as he forged his way swifty ahead. In the distance he could see the white steeple of the church with its gilded cross which seemed to beckon and enocurage him to hasten. A few minutes later he heard the first strokes of the noon bell ringing out the hour of twelve. It seemed to warn him of the passage of time and his need to lose not a moment.

Parting the wheat ahead of him and going as fast as possible, Misi finally, with a sigh of relief saw that he had gained the opposite side. Hastily glancing over his shoulder he looked with dismay at the trail he had left, and with another fervent prayer for pardon, he raced on and on until he came to the wide ditch, which he jumped without difficulty, and sped toward the sandy road. He could see the tire mark of the huge military automobile which had rushed along it a few hours before, and he wondered vaguely if there was any connection with its appearance and the Russian soldiers who had galloped into the meadow.

Finally Misi entered the village street,

but his throat ached from the exertion, and he marveled that the little community showed no signs of strife or impending calamity. Suddenly, just a little way ahead of him he saw the old judge, dressed in the heavy black broadcloth which was befitting his position, walking with calm dignity toward his own home. Among the people of Kapolna, whose men had marched away two years ago to fight for their country, Judge Simon was respected and looked upon as a father, a wise man to advise and help them. So it was natural that at sight of the official, Misi should immediately decide to tell him of the trouble which had come to them. Respectfully he stopped, wiped his perspiring forehead and tried to collect his thoughts, but his tongue was thick in the roof of his mouth and he could not even form the words of the usual simple greeting.

"What ails you, lad?" the judge asked, for it certainly looked as if something were decidedly amiss.

"Surely the Lord brought thee, Judge Simon," he finally replied, and again mopped

his flushed face.

"No doubt the Lord leads our steps, my boy," he answered, then waited to give his young neighbor a moment to collect himself.

"The Lord leads—" Misi repeated.

"Indeed he does. You look as if something has gone wrong; you are panting like a young filly," he said kindly.

"Yes, sir, I've been running hard."

"What is it that made you so incautious?"

"Our land—our army in the mountains is in great danger, and I ran to try to help them—save them!" He panted and wished that he could be off again, for even standing still a moment was a hazard.

"Em," the Judge took his pipe from his mouth and his kindly eyes twinkled as they rested on the slender youngster before him.

"In great danger!" the judge repeated. "Do you think that by running like a wild deer that you will save them?"

"That is—" The boy caught the amused expression and his face became full of anxiety. "Please, Judge Simon, do not tease, it is indeed serious."

"I ask your pardon, lad. What is it?"

"Let us go someplace where I can talk with you—where no one will hear. Our soldiers are in danger!" Misi pleaded so earnestly that the judge no longer permitted the slighest flicker of amusement in his eyes.

"Come in here." He placed a kindly hand on Misi's shoulder and guided him into a nearby shed where he was positive they could discuss whatever was on the lad's mind without fear of being overheard or interrupted. "Now, this is an excellent place, we can talk as long as we like. What is it you wish to tell me?"

"The Russians—a company of them, just went through the further pasture where we penned the calves," Misi panted, and the man looked at him as if he thought the sun had affected the boy's mind. He remained quiet a moment, then spoke soothingly.

"The Russians, my lad, are many miles from here," he said.

"Not all of them," Misi insisted.

"Holy Virgin," the man cried, "did you see ghosts in the full daylight, boy?"

"No, they were not ghosts, I tell you they

were real, a company of them with a Hungarian prisoner, all on horseback."

"Did they see you?"

"Yes, and talked with us, that is, they made the Hungarian talk with us, and he told us we must show them to shortest road —the cut to Stracena Gorge—"

"What's that—" the judge snapped and his pipe fell from his lips.

"They said they must be lead to Stracena Gorge by the short cut," the lad repeated.

"To fall on the back of our own soldiers," the old man gasped in dismay, then he stared incredulously at his small companion. "It isn't possible." But the honest young eyes met his squarely. "Tell me exactly what you saw and heard, my son."

"I saw Russian soldiers and officers, one they called 'His Excellency' and he wore more gold stars than the picture of the Virgin. With them was one of our soldiers, who had lost an arm. He spoke to us in Hungarian, and said they must be led by the short cut." The boy went on hastily, giving minute details of what had passed. As he listened every bit of color left the usually ruddy

cheeks of the village judge, and when he finished, Misi flopped back wearily onto a bundle of hay.

"One of our soldiers. It cannot be possible that he urged you boys to do that—"

"Yes, he did," Misi replied.

"To betray—" Misi sat up straight.

But listen, Judge Simon, when he was talking to us he looked at us terribly sadly, as if he wanted us to know that there was no other way—and maybe we can help."

"Help, a handful of old men and a few untrained boys! God in heaven, have mercy upon our souls.

CHAPTER II

The Old Legend.

At the finish of the boy's account of the appearance of the Russian soldiers and their officer's determination to make his way through the narrow Gorge, Judge Simon leaned heavily against the door of the little shed and seemed too overcome by the impending calamity to think or act. Anxiously Misi watched him and it seemed to the lad that the man upon whom he had placed so much dependance had added, in those few minutes, years to his age. He suddenly appeared hopelessly weak and impotent.

"They are going through the Gorge to attack our soldiers in the rear. That is their plan, it is plain," he mumbled, "and we can do nothing to stop them—nothing." His words trailed off hoarsely, for the judge was perfectly familiar with the place where the enemy proposed to concentrate this attack.

"But, sir, we can do something," Misi protested. "We *must* do something to help our men."

"Even if we had a force of soldiers we could not get to the Gorge and head off the Russians, nor could we get through and warn the troops," the judge replied.

"Can't you send a message, get word, because there is a little more time, Judge Simon—"

"More time?"

"Yes. I told you that when I said I was coming back to let our mothers know where we are, the Lord enlightened me, and now I know why I told the boys to follow the road of the Little Drummer," Misi was growing more excited, and since he had rested a few minutes, he could talk and think more coherently.

"The road of the Little Drummer," the man repeated stupidly and Misi wanted to shake him. "Lad, there *is* no such road."

"But Judge, there is! I tell you, get someone to go fast as he can to someplace from where they can send a telegram to someone who will know what to do. You are a judge

and you know all about what to do," he insisted, then he went on quickly. "Will you lend some of the boys your big drum, and the little one, with the sticks?"

"Yes, surely," the man replied, hardly realizing what he was promising.

"And you can have a telegram sent—"

"No doubt, I shall attend to it. At least we can try, but it is a frail chance that there is time—now this road—"

"I'll explain later. Don't forget to let the boys have the drums," and then without further words, the boy threw open the door and raced away, leaving the man to hobble anxiously toward his home.

With flying feet, Misi ran down the main village street toward the school house, and his brain was working fast. He was glad that it was noon and that his friends, most of them, would be eating their dinner; that would save some time. He thought impatiently of the old man he had just left and determined that when he grew up if he was an official he would see that he didn't become so stupid. On he ran, dodging across gardens and paying no attention at all to

adults who called to tell him that only the Devil was ever in such a hurry. In due time he reached the empty school building and soon he was inside the big class room. At the further corner hung the rope with which

Misi rings the bell

the bell was rung to bring the children to lessons, and grabbing it with hot hands, he started to give it a vigorous pull, but hesitated.

"If I ring hard the Russians may hear it and get suspicious that I am sending out an

alarm," he reminded himself. "Some of their spies may be near by." That wasn't a comforting thought, but by ringing the bell he could more quickly accomplish what he wanted to do, so, with another prayer that the Almighty would help him in this emergency, he gave it a vigorous tug and the bell rang with an insistent clatter. Running to the window he glanced through and in a moment was gratified to see the door of the nearest dwelling flung open and one of his own classmates stand hesitatingly. "It's bringing them," he sighed with relief and running back, gave the rope one more pull. "They will believe we are being called to school," he assured himself, and hoped that he was right.

"What is the meaning of this—Misi, you, my best pupil playing such a prank. I am amazed at you," Miss Maria exclaimed angrily. "Explain this instant how you dare play such a trick!" But the boy waved her aside, then leaped into the doorway. He grinned with relief when he saw boys running from every direction of the town, from the alvez and from the felviz ends, and from

the middle they were rushing toward the school house. "The boy is mad," the teacher declared. "Such a way to get your worthless friends here," she stamped furiously, but still Misi paid no attention to her. In five minutes ten lads were running into the school yard, then he turned to the teacher.

"This is not a prank, Miss Maria, but very serious matter. Will you please run to your house because it is nearest and pack us something to eat as fast as you can? It is no prank. God will bless you for your generous act," he urged.

"I'll do nothing of the sort until you explain yourself," she retorted.

"Then we—" Through the teacher's mind flashed the recollection that Misi never played mean or unkind tricks. He was an excellent scholar and now, somehow, he seemed no longer a boy but a man with some serious problem to face.

"It will take only a few minutes, for I have some bread and meat already cooked," she answered, and then, as if something of Misi's spirit had entered her, she hurried away, while the boys who had assembled

stood about looking with questioning eyes on their leader.

"Do you want us?" one asked.

"I left my dinner and chores," another added. They were all little fellows, but grave and sturdy, and they knew they had something more before them than an afternoon's play.

"You must have some good reason for calling the Little Drummers."

"You are right." Misi looked over the school yard and was apparently satisfied with what he had accomplished. "I need eleven boys who know how to use a drum well, and we need twelve drums, real ones. One of you go to Judge Simon's, he will give you the two he has, and some of you collect pistols—"

"Rifles?"

"Swords, do we need swords, too?"

"This isn't going to be play nor drill. I can't tell you now what it is, but we must have real guns, no toys, and ammunition—"

"Where are you boys going?" demanded a shrill voice, and the lads saw one of the old women hobbling anxiously toward them.

"When we come back, if we ever do, we will tell you," Misi answered gently, then turned again to his pals. "Bring something to eat, too, but don't overload yourself with food, the other things are more important. Hurry and meet me as quickly as you can by the gristmill dam," he ordered.

"All right." The boys disappeared even more quickly than they had appeared, then a light hand touched Misi's elbow.

"Here is bread, meat, and cheese—"

"You will be rewarded in Heaven, Miss Maria," Misi said quickly accepting the basket which was extended to him, then added. "Pray for us, tonight we will need it."

"But what in the Good Lord's name, boy, are you going to do? Where are you going? Does your mother know—"

"Not yet," he interrupted. "What we are going to do is nothing bad; it is some little thing for our country. I cannot tell you more, and please do not say that I told you so much, please."

"Holy Virgin—" Respectfully Misi stooped and kissed her hand. When he

looked up, his lips were set.

"My father is a prisoner—"

"Yes, I know. Now, I have always trusted your good sense and now I hope you are not going to lead eleven boys into danger—"

"Don't forget to pray for us," he said earenstly, then hurried out of the yard, ran quickly along the fence, and a moment later was making his way as fast as his feet could carry him toward the old gristmill dam, which was out of sight of the village. Already three boys with rifles, ammunition, horns and drums were assembled, and they looked questioningly at their leader. In fifteen minutes Misi's friends were all there, eleven lads, and without a word he motioned them to follow him.

Quietly they fell in behind the young leader, every lad wondering what it was all about, but they did not waste energy to ask a single question, for they knew full well that as soon as it was possible they would be given the facts, whatever they were. Everyone of them had relatives in the army; fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins, and many knew that, like Misi's father, some of

their people were in prison camps, others wounded and in hospitals. Now they were sure that they, even though they were only boys, were being called upon to do something for their country. It was nearly nightfall before they were halted at the edge of the foothills, and in the distance they could see the patches of white where the sheep were grazing.

"Now we will rest and eat," Misi ordered. This was done, and they were all mighty glad to be rid of the heavy and awkward paraphernalia they had been carrying all afternoon. The food was devoured in silence, a portion carefully put aside for a morning meal, if there should be one, then a drink at the cool spring, after which they gathered around to hear what was to come next.

"Is it safe to tell us now, Misi?" one asked softly.

"Yes," he replied, "come close." They drew in a tight circle, their heads bowed eagerly forward. "The time has come for us to live up to our name; that name we took after the boy, Ferko Kerekes, who was the

Little Drummer of our magnificent Francis Rakoczy."

"He was only fifteen when he saved the Duke and his regiment," one put in quickly.

"You all know the story. I have asked you to come with me on an equally perilous journey, and if anybody feels, after I have spoken, that he is too young or maybe somebody whom he loves better than his country needs him, let him return to the village from here. Nobody will call him back."

"Tell us what it is," they begged.

"You all know the crystal cave in Dobsina. We have been to it many times and you know that it has three caves, one on top of the other."

"Yes, we know," came the quick response.

"And you know that by the lowest cave you can get into a tunnel, but you do not know where the tunnel leads."

"No, we do not know where it leads," they admitted.

"I was never there myself, but my uncle, who was a miner before he was killed in the war, and worked in the gold mines there, told me that this tunnel is the short cut to

the Gorge of Stracena. See!"

"Yes," they chorused even more eagerly than before.

"Now, my uncle told me that anyone who can get behind the great arch, and then climb on top can hold up a whole regiment—an army. He explained to me about it, but said I was not to visit it or talk too much about it, but tonight I must tell you, for we must go there."

"But Misi," piped up Lajos who was not yet thirteen years old, "are we going to hold up a regiment?"

"Which regiment? Why?" came other queries. .

"Keep still until I finish, then I will tell you answers to all the questions I can," Misi replied, and the boys pressed their lips tightly lest they be tempted to interrupt again. "A Russian regiment is coming into the Gorge to-morrow. I know that for sure; Pista and Laczi will be with them.

"And we'll hurl rocks down on them," piped up Ferko eagerly. He could not keep still another moment. "My grandfather said that a few big rocks and the Gorge

would be so obstructed that it will be impassible."

"No, we are not going to hurl rocks on them, but we are going to manage to keep them there, and maybe save our own brave soldiers from being attacked," Misi replied.

"How are we going to do it?"

"You know how the Little Drummer, *alone* beat his drum there, and the rocks echoed it over and over until it sounded like a whole army. How he *alone* scared the Austrians back until they met the hajdus and perished, every one of them."

"It is one of the bravest deeds of history," declared Lajos, and his eyes shone with enthusiasm at the idea of doing something which might be considered as worth telling as that ancient story.

"I do not believe the Russians will have any idea that we are only a few boys and attack us. Anyway, we shall not be within very easy reach. Our drums will sound like the whole army and will put the fear of God in their souls." Misi went on with a further account of the meeting of the Russians and their Hungarian interpreter, the

agreement to lead them by the short cut to the Gorge, which was a famous tourist resort during peace times, and now stood as a protecting, unscalable wall behind the Hungarian soldiers, who were battling bravely in front of it, assured that the rear was impregnable.

"They will be there and they will turn back and run away," Ferko announced confidently.

"Now I have told you why I asked you to come to help try and save our soldiers who are fighting for our land. I am going to turn around and count three, and when I finish, any who does not want to go, now is the time to fall out."

"Shall we be slaves, or free forever!" came from eleven young husky throats, then started the song of Liberty, and although Misi turned about and probably counted three, no one heard him, nor had a single lad left his place when the leader faced them again. He joined in the song, but they did it softly, lest some spy be nearby and come to investigate what was going on in the dark woods.

"We will rest now and be up before the crack of dawn," he ordered.

Obediently the little band made itself comfortable for the night, and in spite of the fact that their brains were busy and active, their tired bodies soon relaxed and had anyone passed that way he would have seen a dozen courageous young Hungarians, their faces turned toward the great mountains, which seemed to bend over them with a benediction on their enterprise. Inquisitive stars peeped out and blinked. Doubtless the same brilliant points twinkled back into the anxious eyes of some of their people, soldiers on the other side of the great range of the Caparthians, who took their meager rest that night all unconscious of the coming of a huge force behind them; and certainly not one of them dreamed that the boys of his village were started dauntlessly on such a perilous enterprise. Perhaps the spirit of the Little Drummer of long ago, who knew those same mountains, hovered over the sleepers, and perhaps he went on to the Gorge, where his own drum had once filled an enemy with terror, and whispered to the

echoes they must awake again, be alert to send the sounds of the band reverberating from rock to rock, hill to hill, mountain to mountain, with mighty crashes which would not fail to fill the foe with panic and send them rushing back away from their prey.

An hour before there was any sign of dawn in the sky, Misi quietly waked his band. By the light of a few bits of candle they refreshed themselves in the stream, ate what was left of their food, then as the first streaks of light began to turn the darkness into day, they gathered up their precious burdens, started resolutely and swiftly through the great forest, up hills, across plateaus, over ravines, and up again on a higher elevation. On and on they hurried, dreading lest the enemies had pressed forward more quickly than they anticipated and reach the desired goal ahead of them. Every one of them was accustomed to walking, climbing, and carrying burdens, but this morning their backs began to ache, the muscles of their legs

seemed to be raw, but no one uttered a single murmur, no one even suggested a moment's rest. The Little Drummers were carrying on as long as they could keep their feet under them and force themselves forward.

CHAPTER III

With the Enemies

When they had been given the stern order to march and the threat of the officers had been translated hastily to them, the two boys, Pista and Laczi started forward with grave misgivings. It was apparent that the Russians in entering their territory did not know the country, nor was the Hungarian prisoner familiar with that locality. They were sure that if he had ever been there he would know there was no road by the name of the Little Drummer, and furthermore, he would have been aware that they had come far out of their route and miles from the best way to the Gorge of Stracena. Since the beginning of the war the information which had drifted through to their own small village of Kapolna had been meager and contradictory, but Laczi, who was the older, was sure that reliable information had reached them that

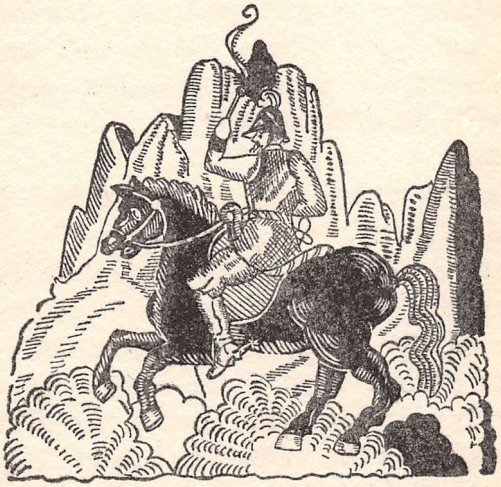
there was fierce fighting beyond this fastness. Indeed this had never been disputed and now he glanced at his companion uneasily, but he dared not say a word to him lest the whip really be put into immediate use.

Through Laczi's mind raced numerous questions, but their answers he could only guess or dismiss entirely. He wondered how the Russians happened to get into this section of the country, but he noticed that while they were riding the Hungarian was more in the lead than at present and that the uniforms which the company wore were like no pictures he had ever seen; besides they were partly concealed under long, heavy capes. Strange, and seemingly impossible stories were told of desperate deeds accomplished by the fighters; daring acts which even surpassed the amazing tales taught in the school histories. Perhaps this company, which was soon joined by more than the lad could count, was made up of such men whose ambitious leader was determined to do something drastic. If they wanted to reach the famous Gorge it must be for the purpose of pressing through some secret passage which

they probably knew, and now two Hungarian boys were doing something which would bring everlasting disgrace upon them.

Pista, who had been hurrying forward, watching his step and never saying a word, now glanced at his companion and their eyes met. The younger boy was troubled, that was plain, and probably he too was considering anxiously what the outcome would be. For Little Drummers who had long ago taken an oath which was known to none outside the band, to conduct themselves all their lives as valiantly as that small boy whose name they had taken as their own, it was a serious matter. Then Laczi thought of Misi who had told them to follow the road of the Little Drummer which would lead them by a round about way to the three caves. He must have had some excellent plan in his mind or he would never have consented to showing the Russians a short cut, or telling his two pals to go by their own secret way, which would take hours longer than actually necessary for the trip. Just then one of the soldiers rode up beside the two boys and looked down on them with a

faint trace of kindliness in his eyes. Behind them the officer who seemed to be in charge of the expedition, was whistling in high good humor, as if he was feeling mighty pleased with himself.



The officer in charge

"He has a son like you," the man said in Slavic and Lasci glanced up with a smile, for most of the people of the village understood that language as well as their own. "I too have a son, smaller than you and I do not want harm to come to you."

"God will surely bless you, sir," Laczi answered.

"Do you think so? Well, I do not want to see boys like you shot, or whipped to death, so let me warn you that if you do not lead us to the Gorge you will never see your homes again, and your whole village will be destroyed—burned until it is ashes, and the wind will blow them away from the site into oblivion."

"We are taking you to the Gorge," Pista told him hastily.

"That is well." He dropped back with his companions, and the company proceeded rather quietly, as if they were anxious that no one should hear them coming if they could possibly avoid it. Far in the distance they could see the mountains rising, in great folds, one back of the other, forming canyons, ravines, ridges, cliffs and treacherous ledges smooth as glass. The two boys' eyes were fixed on one point where two giant ledges came together in a natural arch and the mountain itself was a formidable fortification. In times of peace it was a place loved by tourists, who also visited the gold mines

further on which belonged to the government. Then the Hungarian rode up, and spoke to the young guides.

"His Excellecy wishes to know where we will be at nightfall. He desires to camp and the place must be a good one."

"By nightfall we will be at Tatar Ko, sir," Laczi answered, and the Hungarian smiled, as if he knew that place.

"Thank God," he answered, then went on soberly. "I will tell him that by nightfall we will have reached a good plateau. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"March." The man turned to impart the information and for a moment the two lads were able to speak to each other.

"Maybe they will break their necks on the rocks," Pista whispered hopefully, and his companion nodded. The men were moving forward again, so the boys hurried ahead of them.

The sun was low in the heavens when the company reached the site promised, and here immediate preparations were made to spend the night on the high plateau. Small fires

were built, but carefully sheltered and fed to prevent their smoke from betraying the presence of the soldiers in the Hungarian mountains. Only a few small green tents were erected and before one of these His Excellency sat by a rough, improvised table upon which he spread several charts. Three of his officers bent over them eagerly discussing plans for the next day. Half an hour passed before there was any evidence of food, but finally rations were dealt out to the men, but everyone seemed to forget two hungry boys, and the lads dared not ask for a share. It was the Slav soldier who had spoken to them who came at last with a tin plate and a cup which he set before the guides.

"I am not hungry," Laczi said, and his lips quivered at the idea of eating a meal with enemies.

"You, little lad, will do well to eat, for if you do not, someone may think you are sulking, so, divide it between you and thank God for His blessings." The man walked away immediately and the boy obeyed the order.

"Perhaps they think we do not undersand who they are," Pista said softly, "and it will be better if we let them think we are dumbheads." This was probably their best course so they ate and drank what was set before them, which was meager enough and barely took the edge off their appetites. They had finished the repast when the Hungarian came to them, walking slowly as if he could move only with great effort of will and intense suffering.

"His Excellency commands me to inform you that he has information about this locality, and if you dare to mislead us they will put a bullet through your heads," he explained. "For you I am responsible, and I, too, shall be shot."

"If he has the information on his charts he will know where we are," Laczi replied.

"And that we are nearing the Gorge," Pista added, then went on very soberly, "but if he knows, why did he ask us to lead his company?" A faint smile played about the lips of the soldier.

"Always use your head, lad. That is why the good God gave it to you. I shall tell him

that we are on the way." He walked off in the direction of the chief-of-staff's tent, where that excellent gentleman was thoroughly enjoying a hearty supper.

Finally, except for a goodly number of guards who were placed about the camp and two who were stationed close to the lads, the members of the company stretched out in their coats to rest for the night, and even the boys, whose hearts and minds were troubled, at last closed their eyes and slept soundly. The morning was well advanced when they were wakened by the commotion made by the men roused from sleep and presently the army was bustling with activity. The sun was high in the heavens and shone brightly on the huge plateau, which had never, at least not within the memory of men, been the scene of such an event. Another frugal meal was prepared and eaten, and again the Slav brought a portion to the boys with instructions that they eat it quickly and be prepared to march in short order. Then swiftly the tents were taken down, the horses brought up, packs which were cumbersome and heavy were loaded on the backs of the com-

mon soldiers, and the sharp order was issued that they proceed. One of the officers rode so closely to the boys that they had to dodge the feet of his nervous horse, and with a quick jerk of his hand, he snapped a long whip and laughed heartily as its stinging tip cut deeply into Pista's ear, drawing blood.

Laczi muttered wrathfully. He took his handkerchief and wiped the blood from his wounded pal.

"March," someone snapped, and the horses crowded forward.

With downcast eyes the boys started in heavy silence and presently, when they had left the plateau, the routes grew steeper and narrower with almost every step. Soon only two horsemen could ride side by side and they had to be extremely cautious as they went slowly forward. To the right of them high boulders rose, like walls whose tops were out of sight, and to the left of the ledge, fathoms down, yawned the destroying depths, into which they would be hurled by one false step. Then the way was so bad that they had to ride single file, while most of them dismounted, preferring to lead their horses

rather than risk the treacherous path.

Glancing over their shoulders the boys could see the long line winding its way like some giant snake gliding among the rocks. Part of it was ascending the perilous cliff, as other sections still descended into rocky ravines and small canyons. Far in the distance the boys could see the valley they had left the day before, half hidden by a soft blue haze that mingled with the patches of green. The picture was one of undisturbed peace and it seemed hardly possible that here in the mountains a monster was gliding forward bent upon destroying the harmony of the whole land.

Laczi wondered vaguely why there was no evidence of alarm down there in the fields and pastures. Occasionally he caught glimpses of tiny specks, no larger than insects, but he knew they were men and horses going calmly about their daily tasks, all unconscious of the impending danger. He tried not to think of what the next few hours would bring to them, but through his mind went pictures of the surprised army beyond the great Pass. He thought of the messages

that would come of dead and wounded relatives, the return of straggling remnants of once full companies, and even, as His Excellency had declared, the ruin and pillage of their villages.

"Ahead is a narrow turn, "Pista whispered.

"Yes," Laczi answered, but there was no interest in his tone.

We could dodge into it because we are small, then we could get away by climbing the other side," he went on quickly, being very careful not to look at his companion.

"In five minutes we will be near it," Laczi replied eagerly, and his heart beat hopefully.

"When we get on that flat place, let us go quickly. We will be in before they can look up. Now every man has to keep his eyes on the ground if he does not want to fall and break his neck."

"All right," Laczi agreed promptly.

It was a wonderful plan, and thinking it over the boys were more cheered than since they had parted from Misi in the pasture. Neither of them made any outward sign that might bring suspicion upon them, and a

bullet in their heads, but they proceeded cautiously. They knew that without them as guides the Russians would soon get hopelessly tangled in the maze of turns and twists. They descended a steep cut, then began to climb, glancing back, as they had done every few feet, at the long line behind them. They paused a moment, then faced about, and although their feet itched to carry them in leaps and bounds to the little flat plateau they curbed their impatience nobly, and did not increase their speed.

"Halt!" The command was snapped sharply and the boys stopped in their tracks. After a moment they dared to face about and could hear the officers exclaiming excitedly. Finally the Hungarians and two other men, all on foot, came forward.

"His Excellency has commanded that we keep close to you," the soldier informed them, and the boys' hearts sunk almost to their boots. "Some of the men think you may try to escape and do something treacherous, so you will not lead alone."

"Yes, sir," Laczi answered as if the plan suited him quite as much as anything else.

"They have orders to shoot all three of us if you do not obey implicitly. I do not mind being shot, it would be an easy death, lads, but you are young to die—"

"We do not mind death," Pista answered courageously.

"May the good God help you," he said. "March."

They started again, and reached the little plateau, but neither of them dared even glance at it as they passed. The Hungarian said no more to them but they could hear his painful breathing as he trudged along with them, and now there was always a Russian soldier at the head of the line, the boys right behind him. They could not talk to him, but they let him know which turn to make by overtaking him and pointing out the direction. This new system forced them to proceed more slowly, for the soldier had no relish for his task, and hesitated every few feet instead of jumping from rock to rock with confidence. The delay did not make conditions any more pleasant, and every few minutes the air was rent with harsh curses ripped out by exasperated officers trying to

soothe their nervous steeds. Three times soldiers stumbled, clutched desperately and upset men ahead and behind them.

"We must be nearing the Gorge," the Hungarian said grimly.

"In ten minutes we will reach it," Pista told him.

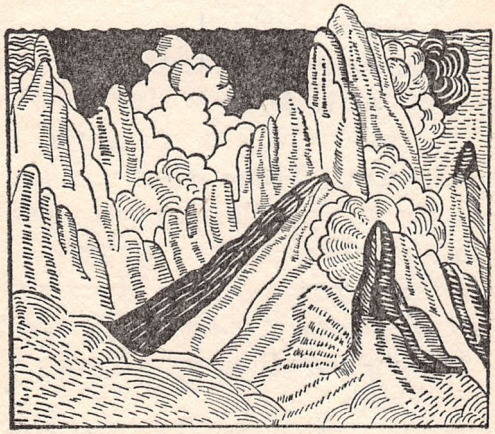
"The road of the Little Drummer is very long," he added.

"The longest there is," said Laczi, and the man's eyes smiled.

"I shall pray to the Holy Virgin for mercy on your souls when it is discovered," he said. The leader stopped and the boys had to show him how to proceed.

The ten minutes were long ones, but slowly they passed, and the sun was high in the heaven when at last the lads paused, the giant Gorge just a short distance away from them. A sharp order came to go on, so they did a bit more quickly and presently had entered the famous cavern. Still they marched forward. Laczi thought of the long line slowly shortening as it disappeared through the huge entrance, as if the mountain were swallowing it up. No one

spoke, and only the steady tramp of feet on the cold stone broke the silence which surrounded them, and the boy, who was now in the lead for a moment, wondered what they must do next, but he did not need to



The Gorge of Stracena

wonder long, for suddenly, from in front, behind, above and apparently below them, came the sharp crash of drums, hundreds of them, their military beat drowning every other sound for miles around, mingled with the snap of musketry. The Russians backed and yelled in terror.

"We have been taken into a trap," cried

the Slav. There were shrieks and curses, and in the panic the two lads, each supporting the Hungarian prisoner, dodged with him into a narrow crevice, climbing into a high chamber, where they were safe from the panic stricken feet which would have trampled them ruthlessly to death.

"God be praised," the Hungarian whispered hoarsely. "Listen to them. They have gone mad. Those inside are trying to get out, probably climbing all over each other in their fear. What regiment is it that came in time to save us and Hungary—"

"You will know by and by," Laszi told him. "If you can climb up we can get out."

"I can climb."

They helped him up and presently were in an upper chamber, which still rang with the sounds of drums, but above that there was the unmistakable sound of real musketry, real soldiers, for after Misi left him, Judge Simon had got word of the proposed attack to the army, and while the enemy was making its painful way to the coveted Gorge, the Hungarians had come with machine guns double quick by the short route, and cut off

the enemy company. At last the boys and their companion were outside and could see the fight, but it was soon over, and the Russians were taken prisoners, everyone of them, including His Excellency. It took some time to restore a semblance of order and eventually the Little Drummers, happily united, returned to their homes and were heartily welcomed by Miss Maria as well as everyone in the village.

The Hungarian soldier was taken into the home of Misi, where he was tenderly cared for, and finally the story reached the ears of Archduke Joseph, the highest in command. A summons was sent to Misi and his friends. They dressed up in their best and when at last they were before the assembly waiting to honor them, everyone of them wished heartily that he were someplace else. Speeches were made in which the Commander thanked them for their splendid service, and decorated each one.

"Is there anything else you boys would like?" the commander asked and he smiled down at the sturdy youngsters.

"My mother, has no other man but me to

help on the farm and if you coud send her the Slav—he gave us something to eat, and he has a little boy in some Russian village," Pista spoke up fearlessly, for he was the first to discover that even an Archduke is only a human being.

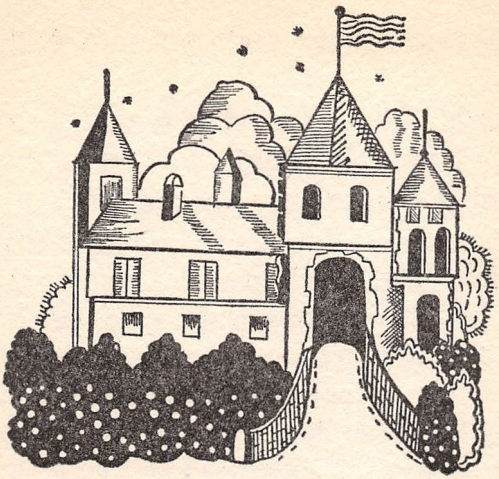
"No doubt she does need another man, especially as you may be finding something more to do for your country, my lad. We will send the Slav along with you, and some other abled-bodied men to help with the crops."

"Thank you, sir—I mean—"

"You mean 'thank you, sir,'" the duke interrupted, then they shook hands all around, and although the beginning of the meeting was most formal, its close was decidedly less conventional, and everybody seemed to think it exactly right. When the Little Drummers marched away, they were escorted by a real army drum corps that kept pace with them while crowds cheered the brave lads who had risked so much for Hungary.

The End.

THE PLOTTERS



CHAPTER I

Conspiring

"Do you suppose that you can do it, George?" The questioner was a dark-skinned boy with black, deep-set eyes that looked gravely out from under well-arched brows. Although he was very young his handsome face wore such a serious expression that he appeared several years older. He was dressed in the national costume of the Rumanian nobility, and everything about

him symbolized the rank and wealth of his family.

"Surely, Boris, I told you that I would do it if I possibly could," George replied.

"And you'll be very careful—"

"Of course. You don't suppose I'll deliberately make a fluke do you?" There was a bit of irritation in the tone, but it was not caused so much by his pal's persistence as by an undercurrent of anxiety that the promise might be one he could not keep. George was a blue-eyed, tow-headed youth whose costume contrasted sharply with the very elaborate dress of his companion, but neither of them noticed that, unless Boris rather envied the ducks, the bright slip-over sweater, low shoes, golf stockings and cap which showed traces of careless adventure.

"I know you wouldn't fluke; but cross your heart—"

"Now, look here," George interrupted with genuine impatience, "I am not a baby and neither are you. Just skip that cross your heart, hope to die stuff. We don't hope to die at all—"

"I did not mean to be offensive," Boris spoke gently.

"Sure you didn't," answered George. "I know that you are mighty anxious about this thing," he paused and glanced about apprehensively, to assure himself that there was no chance of an eavesdropper's lingering in the vicinity. The pair were seated on the marble rim of the fountain in the royal gardens of Borodia in Rumania, and now the older lad bent closer as if interested in something in the water. "If I promise, I promise, but, I told you before, London is a big place, and if I don't find him, I can't give it to him."

"Yes, I know," Boris sighed heavily.

"But I'll do my best, you can be sure of that."

"Thank you so much, my friend." Boris showed signs of becoming emotional, but George had a good healthy American boy's dislike of being kissed, so he straightened quickly to prevent such a calamity.

"Have you got the letter written?"

"Shss, for heaven's sake, not so loud."

"I hardly whispered," George protested. "You have the jumps."

"Maybe I have, but this lovely park is full of my aunt's most obedient servants, and if one of them got even a suspicion he'd fly to her with the information,—then I should be called before her—"

"And I should be swiftly banished from your royal presence and perhaps our Government would be asked to recall my father from his post here. You can be assured, I'll watch my step and look out for tacks or glass in the road," George said hastily.

"You are most generous—"

"It's the way I'm dressed. I've promised to do something which like as not I've no business to do, but I've promised, so that's that. You should have your letter ready now, but get it to me as soon as you can. Don't wait until the last minute before we start for London."

"I shall not," Boris answered, and then his heart seemed lighter and he smiled a really boyish smile, almost a grin.

"And remember, while I'm gone, don't bank too much on it. Your dad is exiled in England; he may not even be in London, and if he's in the next block from me I may

not locate him, but be sure to give me his last address and I'll try my best. Get it written quickly because the longer you wait the less easily you will be able to give it to me." George broke off suddenly and began to laugh. "See that one dive!" He pointed to a flick of silver darting through the water just as an orderly came marching close to the young conspirators.

"I have told you he is the most lively," Boris replied. Although he had not looked about he could see the soldier's reflection in the water and understood why his companion had changed the subject so quickly. The two sat intently watching the movements of the beautiful fish, and at last the man slowly withdrew, but the topic was not resumed for several minutes.

"That was a close shave," George whistled.

"Indeed it was," Boris admitted, then went on, "He has to make the rounds now, so I beleive that we are safe for a while. I am so happy. It will be the first time since my father left that I shall be able to send him a letter."

"Don't bank on it too much," George

warned again.

"Aunt Maruca has spies everywhere and she has told me that my father was a traitor to his country, but I know that is not true. She says that if I correspond with him, I too will be a traitor—"

"She surely is not very pleasant."

"You know what they do to traitors in Rumania!"

"No, I do not, but I expect it is something choice."

"They shoot them," Boris whispered and his lips were white.

"If your father was a traitor why didn't they do that to him?" George demanded quickly.

"I—I don't know," Boris admitted, and George grinned.

"She's been filling you full of—well—say, this isn't the middle ages. Any criminal, even traitors, are given a trial before judges and juries, and they fight it out—and—if the man is not guilty he goes free—"

"Maybe that is the way they do in your country, but this is not the United States. Many things are still done in Rumania which

are kept secret from the world—I know of what I speak," Boris declared emphatically.

"Great little old place this," George replied. Although he did not say so, he still believed that justice ruled in all parts of the world and that Boris' aunt had been telling him things which would frighten him and keep him from trying to get in touch with his banished father.

"Just wait until my father gets back. He wants everyone treated alike, as in your country. He wants even his very poor peasants taken care of and helped. My English tutor told me that they banished my father because of those ideas. Because he wanted to make all people more equal."

"That's the best kind of government," George said.

"And when my old grandfather was dying the bojars made him sign a will, or a paper, saying that my father should not inherit the dukedom."

"But your father is the oldest son. They could not take his title away from him. I mean not even your grandfather could do that!" George insisted. "He must have been

forced to do it before he died."

"Perhaps he was, but they fixed it somehow so that the property shall be held until I come of age, and that my aunt and uncle Biberescu shall be regents. I do not want to be a duke if they took the title away from my father—I want my father."

"Well, I shouldn't want to be a duke either. It's poor business, I think," George agreed.

"I want my father back. I have had no one, not since my mother died,—no one until you came, and now you are leaving me too—" The younger boy bent his head sadly.

"Aw, look here, I'm not going to be gone forever. Buck up." George was embarrassed. If anyone but the sad young Boris had sat blinking beside him, he would have gone off in disgust or called him a sissy, but the lad was not a sissy, he was in very real trouble; that was why George had agreed so rashly to assist him if possible. "Wonder what I should do if I lost my mother and father," he thought, and glanced at his companion. He gave himself a little shake.

"Buck up, Boris. If anyone saw us they might think you are getting too confidential, or that I'm no good as a pal."

"They must not suspect that," Boris replied and blinked hard.

"Besides, the English tutor has been a good friend."

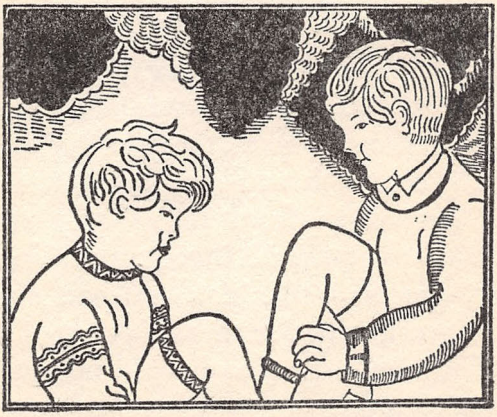
"He was," sighed Boris again, "but when my aunt found that he was teaching me French history, about the revolution, she called him to task and ordered him to take out such subjects from the history studies. He did that because he loved me and wanted to stay, but soon she got someone else. I have not seen him for three days, so I know that he has had to go, and could not even say goodbye to me."

"That's a shame," George declared with genuine feeling.

"My aunt could not do anything to an English subject, so I suppose she managed to get him out of the country," Boris explained, then went on, "Pardon me, George, for acting so like a baby—"

"That's all right, I don't blame you a bit, old man. I see your French tutor meander-

ing this way and I guess you are late for your lesson. Cheer up, get your letter ready," he said in a low tone, then added in a louder tone, "I never saw the fish act so funny. Goodbye for the present. Hope you don't



George and Boris plotting the letter

have as much trouble with French verbs as I do—golly, they are tough to remember."

"I am very bad," Boris admitted. By that time the French instructor was close to the boys, and, with as formal a bow as he could muster, the American lad took his departure, leaving the lonely little Boris to do battle with the French verbs.

At a swift swinging pace George traversed the great park, followed the main winding path which took him towards the entrance of the castle grounds, and finally, with permit in hand, he passed the sentry stationed at the great iron gates, which were swung open to let him pass. With a sigh of relief he made his way more slowly along the street shaded by enormous trees whose age could not even be guessed. But George was not interested in the age of the trees, although he admired them greatly. He was busy thinking of Boris and the promise he had made and wondering uneasily how he could carry out the mission, and what, if he succeeded in carrying it out, the result would be. It might be almost anything, and although the American laughed at the idea of torture, he had heard snatches of tales which, in the light of what he proposed to do, were disquieting to say the least.

Finally he reached his own home, over which the stars and stripes waved a comforting assurance. His father, who was a high official attached to the American Embassy, had brought with his son as much

of the informality of their own land as possible, and while the children of European diplomats could never leave their own grounds without attendants, George was permitted to go about by himself to some extent, for his father believed that absolute lack of freedom was not conducive to the best of health; added to which he thought that the youngster would make wholesome contacts with boys outside his own circle and learn to know different kinds of people wherever he met them. Now the lad's mind was going over the strange details of his life since he had come abroad, and he wished very hard at that moment, to be back in his own country, but that would take him away from Boris, so he put the idea of asking Dad if they couldn't go home, if only for a little while, out of his head.

Two years before this meeting of Boris and George in the park, Her Highness, Maria Elena Anastasia had made an exhaustive survey of the children from other lands who lived in the numerous Embassies, with an idea of selecting a suitable playmate for the future Duke of Sinaia. After several weeks

of devotion to the task she came to the conclusion that the majority of the children knew too much court gossip, fact and fiction, so she determined to take a lad who appeared entirely ignorant of affairs of the government, one who was least likely to tell her nephew the truth about his father's banishment. George Masse, if he knew anything about the intrigue of the country to which his father was appointed, kept it strictly to himself during the interview, so he was later invited to a private tea and puppet show given in Boris' apartment of the castle. It had been a great meeting, the lads liked each other immediately, so George was chosen.

Since that day the boys, who had a mutual love of swimming, fencing, and other sports, became close friends, and the American lad went to the castle as many hours every day as Boris' manifold duties and studies permitted. The arrangement was satisfactory to Mr. Masse so long as his son's lessons were not neglected and also so long as the daily trips to the castle did not weigh too heavily on the young shoulders, for Mr. Masse did not propose to allow the rather gloomy life of

the young duke to dampen the bubbling enthusiasm of his boy.

Several times the procedure was reversed and Boris came with his attendants to visit George, but both lads agreed that at the castle or in its vast gardens there was more opportunity for enjoyment than in the smaller dwelling of the Masse's. With a frown on his usually jolly face, George entered the house.

"Where is my father?" he asked the servant. "Did he come home?"

"Yes, Master George, but he went into his study leaving orders that he does not wish to be disturbed," the man answered.

"I'll see him when he is finished," George answered, not especially to the man, but because he was thinking out loud. He wanted to have a talk with his father, and although he did not mean to break his promise to Boris about keeping the secret of the letter, there were other things he wanted to know about the small playmate. Suddenly, before he could turn around, a pair of soft hands were placed over his eyes by someone who had leaped out from behind him.

"Guess who? Guess! You must guess," called a voice which was decidedly feminine.

"As if I can not. Lillian, you're poking out my eyes. Think they are set in concrete?" He whirled about, and although his tone was gruff his lips grinned. "When did you arrive?"

"An hour ago, but they told me that you were doing your daily with the nephew of the arch—what-is-she?" The girl was about twelve years old, a bit younger than her cousin, and now she shook her head so hard that her chestnut curls came tumbling over her laughing eyes.

"If you must be so disrespectful, my cousin, we had better go to the cellar," he told her. "It's great to see you."

"It's topping to be here. Georgy Porgy, Puddin' Pie, remember how I used to get back at you for pulling my hair by calling you that—"

"Of course I do, but I haven't pulled your hair yet, although I am likely to if you do not have a care." He made as if to give the unruly tresses a good tug, but she frowned forbiddingly.

"I am too old for such childishness now," she informed him with a deep curtsy. How could I tease such a grand person as the Honorable George Adams Masse. One of these days—maybe in ten years—you will even have a moustache," and she made a grimace.

"Well, you'll never grow up," he told her. "Who brought you?"

"Squire, I'll show you if I can not be grown up. I give you to understand, sir, that I have just arrived from Hixby near London, where I have spent a most profitable year in a most proper school for English girls. In a few minutes you can see by my polished speech and manner how greatly I have benefited. One of the governesses escorted me here—the one who applied most of the veneer, and I am to spend the summer vacation with my esteemed aunt and her more than esteemed family, which includes your good—"

"Hop off, your engine's on fire. Open your parachute and come to earth," George bellowed. "Are you training for the Senate? You'll make a grand filibuster."

"Is that nice?"

"Sure it is. Don't you know that we are leaving in less than two weeks for London, Dad and I?—"

" You may go whenever you like, but I am going to remain with Aunt Letty and I shall not even miss you. Now that we have seen each other, I must take a bath, which isn't considered a proper topic for anything but very private conversation. I shall return anon—so farewell until I remove the stains of travel." She blew him a kiss, then the airy little person pirouetted across the room and disappeared among the rich hangings over the door at the further end.

"Don't hurry," George called after her.

Left alone in the huge library the boy pulled one of the big leather arm-chairs close to the window and stared out at the beautiful scenery which stretched for miles in a seemingly endless picture of loveliness. Borodno was a resort consisting of delightfully cool homes to which not only the family of the Duke of Vassilisko, but most of the members of the Embassies fled from the arid heat of Bucharest. George could see the dis-

tant mountains where the king's summer residence was hidden between snowy peaks, and far away the southern range of the Carpathians was mysteriously veiled in a blue and purple mist.

However, the magnificence of the scenery was, at the moment he was staring at it, far from George Masse's thoughts. His whole mind was absorbed with affairs at the home of the Duke, and the lonely little lad whose heart ached so bitterly for his father. He wondered what good he would get out of life, out of being a vojvoda (duke) if he had to spend all his years wishing for his father.

"If they find out that Boris has written a letter for me to take to his father, will I be a traitor?" he asked himself, and tried to argue the ethics of the question pro and con. "This isn't my country, so how could I be a traitor for anything I do here?" Then he thought further, his father was a representative of the American Government, and in that office, would certainly expect his son to respect the laws of the land in which he was living. If he did anything against the law,

then he really would be a traitor to his own country. That was most disquieting, but then his mind was inspired. There really was no law that a boy, even the young duke, should not get word to his father. It was merely something Boris' aunt had made up.

Having reached this comforting conclusion, George sighed with relief, then, finding that his father was still occupied, decided to visit the stable, sure that this was the place his cousin would come the moment she was dressed.

CHAPTER II

A Difficult Undertaking

After George Adam Masse left the castle grounds, Boris devoted himself to his studies so well that he earned an extra credit mark from his delighted tutor, but later when the pair walked about the gardens the man was astonished to have his pupil change from his usual alert self to an apathetic one he could not understand. Twice the lad answered queries as if he had not heard them correctly, and several times he failed to make any reply at all.

"Anything wrong, my boy? Do you feel ill?" the tutor finally asked with real concern.

"Thank you, I am quite well, Monsieur Brissot."

"That is excellent," the tutor sighed with

relief. "Something perhaps is troubling you?"

"Not much," Boris replied with a show of indifference although he was very much interested in his plan.

"Something little which seems like much?" the tutor tried again.

"Well, I was wondering if my aunt will permit me to go to George Masse's house tomorrow, or next day."

"Surely permission will be granted. So well you have done your lessons with me I shall be delighted to propose a visit. Madam Masse is above reproach."

"I know that, but what I was wondering is if she will give her consent to my going alone," Boris went on. The man's eyebrows went up and his shoulders shrugged in a manner forever French.

"Alone! What a strange idea!" he exclaimed with a smile.

"But George Masse goes about alone," Boris persisted impatiently.

"Certainement, my lad, but Master George, he is an American. Very distinguished, but American, a democrat here as in his own

land," the tutor evaded. He was very fond of his young pupil, pleased with the progress the lad was making in his studies, and often his heart ached for the little fellow whose life was so hedged-in away from almost everything dear to boys of his age.

"Well, do you think that you could take me and leave me at his house, for just a little while, so I can go with George as other boys do, maybe to the stable where the horses are?" he proposed eagerly.

"Alone to the stable?" The man frowned.

"I don't mean any special place. The reason I said the stable is because they have horses and a young colt I haven't seen."

"Yes."

"But just any place George happens to feel like taking me. Please, it would give me such pleasure for a little while," he begged so earnestly that the man's heart was touched.

"I fear that Madam la Duchesse would be greatly aggrieved if we ask such permission," he warned.

"Oh, please do not ask her! She must not know! It is only for once to see how it

feels to be alone, by myself, I mean, with other boys. George will be there. You know I am safe with him." Boris was so excited now that his eyes flashed and his dark cheeks were flushed.

"It is much to ask—"

"But just for once," Boris persisted. Getting this permission was so important.

"Well, *enfant*; for once, but only once. This request you will not ask of me again."

"Never," Boris cried happily. Hurrah! *Vive la France!*" Then he became all attention to a French conversation lesson and further delighted his teacher. For the first time in months he laughed heartily and seemed to forget that his father had been banished far from their home land.

Boris could hardly wait until the day was over and he had retired to his chamber. With a great pretense of sleepiness he permitted his valet to perpare him for bed, and yawned so often that the man hastened with the task, saw that the youngster was safely tucked in, then left the room on tiptoe, leaving only one dim light burning, confident that Boris was already asleep. No

sooner did the latch catch than the lad was out of bed and wide awake. His first impulse was to turn the switch, but he quickly decided against anything so rash.

"I will not make more light, but do with this," he whispered. Just then the sound of subdued voices reached his ears and a moment later, when the Duchess entered, she found her nephew covered to the neck, his eyes closed naturally, his long dark lashes casting a bluish shadow on the rosy boyish face. Calmly she gazed down at the little fellow, so small in his great bed.

"I shall devote my life to seeing that his blackguard father never has an opportunity to mislead this innocent soul," she murmured, and as the words fell on the boy's ear, his fist clenched under the bed-clothing as if he longed to spring up and defy her authority. "A true Vassilisko he is and no one shall take away his heritage; not even his own father, who would abuse it." Then she made the sign of the cross to keep the Vampire away. That duty performed, she too tip-toed out of the room lest he be disturbed. Again the door closed softly and

the latch sprung. But Boris waited a moment to be sure that he was at last alone before he leaped out of bed the second time.

The room on one side was flooded by

Great Aunt Maruca

moonlight. Lithe as a young panther, Boris made his way to the door, opened it with the greatest caution, peeped through the crack, then slipped in among the heavy draperies and felt his way along the wall until he reached a niche in which stood a Venetian

candelabrum which held nine candles. It was but the work of a moment to pull one out and slip back by the way he had come, but his heart was beating so furiously that he was amazed the pacing guard did not hear it and spread the alarm. Once back in his own room, he sighed with relief. His next act was to place the better light by his bed, then taking a pad and pencil he had concealed for this very occasion, he began to write.

"My darling Dad," he began, then paused to consider what to say. Soon his ideas were crowding to be expressed on the paper and his pencil was racing across the sheet.

"Perhaps you think that your little son has forgotten you, because I promised to write to you often and have never done so. Many times I have desired to write to you and ask you to return to me. I am very lonely for you. Aunt Maruca does not permit any letters to go unopened. She told me that you are a traior to your king and country, and anyone who writes to you is himself a traitor.

"I know that my Dad is not a traitor. I told them I wanted to be like you and banished too, but the Duke swore and said that

traitors shall not be banished any more but shot right away for they are very bad. That made me afraid and I thought they were not sending you my letters so I waited and waited to write when they would not know. George Masse promised to take this to London. He is an American boy and not afraid of my aunt, or anybody here, and he said that even real traitors should be given a trial and a chance to prove if they are or not.

"I want you to know that I do not want to be a duke. You come home please and be the duke. Aunt makes many unhappy, and my Eglish tutor, before they sent him away, said that your peasants are treated like serfs and the taxes are so high they cannot pay. They are very poor.

"You can see, Dad, that you must come back because I do not know how to make things any better and it will be a long time before I am old enough. Why don't you write to the King, he loved you, and I know that he would let you come back. If you cannot come back, please let me be banished with you. Ask the King!

"I am all right otherwise. I have two new

dogs and a new mare to ride, only it is lonesome. I wish I could be an American like George, who goes around by himself. He's going to be an African explorer when he grows up. I'd like to be one too, dear Dad. Please send me an answer by George when he comes back from Lodon. He will get it to me and no one will see it. And please do everything you can to come back to your

Loving son,

Boris."

It was finished at last, carefully folded and tucked away safely until it could be given to the American lad to deliver to the father in far away London. The next day permission was asked to visit the home of the Masse's to see the young colt. The Duchess had just finished a report that the crops throughout the country were exceptionally good, which meant to her that heavier taxes could be levied, so she was feeling in an excellent humor. She pinched the lad's cheek and after inquiring who was to be at the American boy's home, she granted permission, so that a bit later, a very happy, hopeful youngster rode dutifully beside his tutor

toward the house of the representative from the United States. The precious letter was carefully hidden under his tunic and he glanced eagerly at the French teacher and prayed that the man would not forget his promise.

When Boris' father had left the capital he had managed to leave with his son an address through which he could be reached, but that was nearly two years ago, so that he could only hope that in some way his message would find his father. He had a great deal of faith in the ability of George Masse to fulfill the commission, for was not George an American, and did he not go about by himself, sometimes to nearby towns in Rumania? Such a friend was bound to succeed. By the time the boy reached his destination, his heart was light and his eyes danced.

"Hello, we're waiting for you," George greeted his guest. "They sent word that your august self would be here at five and by a vote of the people may stay to tea. That's great. This is my cousin Lillian. She has been crazy to meet a real duke, even

a little one."

"Thank you very much for your great kindness," Boris said, as if he were repeating a lesson. "It is a pleasure to meet Miss Lillian."

"You needn't call her 'Miss,' she is only a—"

"I am twelve years old, George Adams Masse," the girl retorted indignantly, then recalled that she was in the presence of royalty and flushed with confusion. "We are honored to have—" She was making a curtsy which did full credit to her training, when her cousin burst out laughing.

"Oh, treat him like a regular fellow."

"Please do," Boris added quickly. They were in the big library, and in a moment Mr. and Mrs. Masse came to welcome the arrivals and comply with the rigid etiquette for which the occasion called. Formalities over, George again took command.

"What shall we do?" he asked. He was sure that Boris had some plan, and he hoped the letter was ready.

"You promised that I might pay a visit to the new colt," the youngster answered

promptly. "That I should like to do very much."

"Suits me," George told him, and glanced at the Frenchman, but that worthy gentleman was absorbed in some old French prints which the Masses treasured, so, with a nod of his head, the young Duke signified his intention of leaving without disturbing the adults. This rather astonished George, but he followed quickly and a few minutes later the three were on their way to the stables. It was a wonderful adventure but they had not gone very far when Lillian stopped short and stared at the dark face of the lad walking beside her.

"You look just like a man I saw in London," she told him. "The same sort of eyes, deep in your head."

"Is that so?" Boris replied politely but not especially impressed.

"Yes. He calls at my uncle's house and my cousin, she is grown-up, told me that he is a Rumanian—"

"A Rumanian?" Boris was greatly interested now. "His name, please, can you tell me? It flashed through his mind that if he

looked like the Rumanian gentleman in London it was possible the man was—but that was surely too much to hope.

"Count Trojan," she answered. All the color left Boris' face.

"What's the matter?" George demanded. He had not been paying much attention to the conversation, for in the distance he could see the grooms exercising some of the horses and the eager creatures were prancing and nickering as if delighted with themselves.

"Count Trojan is the name by which my father goes in London. It is the name of one of his estates, and he does not use his own title," Boris was so excited that he could hardly get the words out. "God is indeed good."

"Sure," George agreed, still somewhat mystified.

"That is my father," Boris whispered, "and your cousin has seen him in London."

"You have?" The lad turned quickly to the little girl. "Where did you see him?" he demanded.

"At Uncle Harold's. He comes there every week because he is interested in some-

thing Uncle Harold is doing. I do not know what it is." Lillian felt very important that she should have unwittingly given their important little companion some interesting information, then she turned to the boy. "If he is your father, why—"

"Shss," George interrupted quickly. "I'll tell you about it later. Let's talk about something else.

"He's just as nice as he can be," Lillian told them, "and plays with my little cousin Hal."

"Great guns. Where's the letter, Boris? No one is looking, so, if you have it, better let me take it now while we have a chance," George urged. If Count Trojan were really the man he was to seek in London, and the Count was a regular visitor at the home of his uncle, the task of delivering the missive was amazingly simplified. It might even be easy to fetch a message back to his lonely little pal.

"We are to be left alone; I arranged for that," Boris said eagerly fishing under his tunic. He brought out the packet and under the protection of his cap, managed to

transfer it to George, who hastily tucked it into his own inside pocket.

"Good work," he said with a sigh of relief. You must have done something very special to win such a whale of a reward."

"My aunt is not aware of it and I gave my word not to ask again," Boris told them. I had to write it last night with only one candle that gave little light."

"Did you get up out of bed?"

"After my aunt had gone for the night."

"You were lucky to manage it."

"I wish you'd tell me about it," Lillian urged, feeling that she was being left out of something very interesting.

"It's a great secret," George answered, "but I'll tell you all about it when the time comes. You'll be the first to know."

"And if you will accept my thanks, my deep gratitude is yours," the young duke said earnestly. "I knew it would be well and I had to get it written and to my father."

"Guess I'd do anything I could for my Dad," George said.

"Can't your father come home?" Lillian persisted.

"Well, you tell me all about it, and if he

"No, not at present," Boris admitted.

"Are you going to start a revolution?" the girl pried.

"Oh, Lillian," George protested.

"I would do that if it would do any good," Boris replied soberly.

"It would be better if you ran away to join him," she said, and Boris smiled.

"Join him I should like to do most in the world," the youngster admitted.

"That would not help him come back," George declared emphatically.
has only half an hour we had better get to the stables or we'll have to turn back," Lillian announced importantly.

"The Saints are indeed with us," Boris smiled, quite a wide, hopeful smile, and in his mind raced a picture of the reunion with his father, who would surely manage to join his son.

The three hastened on their errand, and although all of them were thinking too much

of the exciting events to come and the thrill of the last few moments to pay a great deal of attention to the horses, or even the lovely little colt trotting in a special stall beside his mother, they watched the antics of the splendid pair with growing enthusiasm until finally the precious half hour was up.

CHAPTER III

A Trying Wait.

It was nearly two weeks after George received the letter that he left with his father for London, and the days that followed were anxious ones for Boris. Sometimes he was filled with dread lest his friend be unable to accomplish the great thing he had promised; other times he thought of his father as ill, perhaps too ill even to read the missive; and then sometimes his heart would leap in eager anticipation and he would bravely banish all fear of failure.

Without the casual visits of the American boy, the young Duke grew very, very lonely. He desperately missed the cheery companionship of his jolly pal, missed their talks and walks, but he did pay a visit to the Masse home where he found Lillian quite good fun even if she was a girl. Later, the

Saints intervened for him again and George's cousin was invited to the castle. She succeeded in winning the favor of the Archduchess and after due formality was presented with a pass which admitted her without question to the ancestral halls and gardens as often as Boris had time to play. The two soon grew to be excellent friends but they were never allowed to be alone together, nor was Boris ever again granted a moment's real freedom. For a time he lived in dread lest his aunt discover the breach which had already been committed—the disobeying of her strict orders, but as the days went by, one by one, the French master was not replaced as the English one had been, and the lad grew confident that his secret had not been discovered.

Frequently the boy and girl sat on the rim of the fountain where they watched the gold and silver fish, and with heads bent low they often managed to exchange a word. Lillian told him of letters her cousin sent his mother, and sometimes she brought picture postcards for him to read. In all the weeks absence only two were received by Boris and neither

of them said a word which would give him an inkling of what was transpiring in London. He read each one over and over, assuring himself that his pal was being careful about what he put on paper. One card was a picture of a wide river thick with small boats and jolly trippers, and it announced that the American lad had spent Sunday there. The other one showed Windsor Castle and declared that George was "having a great time."

With a sigh of disappointment Boris tucked the cards in the pigeon hole of his ancient study desk and wondered if the good times the two had enjoyed together would ever be renewed or if something unpleasant would happen to keep them far apart. Sometimes he thought of running away to find his father, but the constant guard and servants surrounding him made him quickly dismiss the idea as impossible. Twice Lillian rode beside him in the stately carriage when they drove through the lovely country and then the girl was so interested in the picturesque villages and tiny farms that she paid little attention to her host, but Boris was glad that

she enjoyed herself seeing things which he knew almost with his eyes closed.

Then came a day when a splendid fete was held in the castle gardens; tea was served and the whole assembly was most gay and festive. As if he were already a full-fledged duke, Boris stood beside his dignified aunt and uncle when guests were received, but finally that drew to a close, and he strolled for a few minutes with Lillian, who thoroughly enjoyed herself.

"It is wonderful of your aunt to give such a party," she declared politely, then added under breath and quickly, "George is coming back next week."

"We are greatly honored by the distinguished company," Boris answered, then followed with a swift question.

"Did he—"

"Careful," she warned. "When I return to school next month I shall make all the girls envious when I tell them that even if I am not very old I was permitted to attend such a grand function."

"You will recall your vacation with happiness?"

"Oh, very much," she replied warmly, then added, "may we go as far as the fountain?"

"Surely," he glanced over his shoulder and saw a man-servant in elegant green livery following at a respectful distance. "These trees and hedges were set out by my great, great grandfather."

"That is wonderful." They strolled further and once they turned into a by-path and the little girl spoke quickly. "George says to tell you that he delivered the letter. Do you expect to come and see the colt again before you go to the capital?"

"I should like to very much."

"We shall all be leaving soon, my aunt says, so I hope that you can come before the horses are sent away. Here is the fountain. We have one, only it is not so large, at school, but in the winter they take the fish out and put them in glass tanks in the conservatory."

"Is that so?" Boris tried to be interested in what went on in a girls' school, but it was not easy. "When is your uncle returning?"

"Next week," she replied.

"It will give me great pleasure to see my

friend George again. You have been very kind to come and play with me," he remarked, and then they faced about and started back to join the Duchess. "After sundown there will be fireworks."

"I am sorry that we cannot wait to see them," Lillian exclaimed. "Are you riding tomorrow?" Boris glanced at his aunt.

"My nephew will have to give up his riding for a time. His groom has been injured and it may be several weeks before he will be able again to accompany Boris. I am very particular about his riding and do not care to trust him with any of our other men," the Duchess spoke up pleasantly. "He is disappointed, but it cannot be helped."

"We have an excellent young man; one we brought from the United States. The Ambassador considers him the most valuable horseman in the country. He was brought up on a ranch—knows horses remarkably well. It will give us pleasure if you care to consider him," Mrs. Masse offered, for she knew just how much Boris enjoyed the horseback rides.

"Your offer is most generous," the Duchess said graciously. "I have heard of your man, in fact, at one time I hoped to secure his services. If you will be good enough to send him to see me, I shall interview him. Autumn is coming quickly and Boris will have little opportunity to ride when he returns to the capital. Thank you so much, Mrs. Masse."

"Thank you very much," Boris repeated dutifully, but his heart leaped, for he was wondering if the American groom might not be another maneuver of the Good Saint who was watching over his destiny.

Later the guests took their departure and the lad could hardly wait for the morrow, for he had seen the American who had been born and brought up on a ranch and knew horses from the tips of their tails to the tips of their velvety noses. The morning came at last, and the French teacher informed his pupil that the Duchess had succeeded in getting a fine man to continue his lessons, so, half an hour later, the boy was ready for the ride and barely managed to suppress a grin of delight when he discovered that his new

master was no other than the tall American.

"I am glad to see you," he said politely. "And thank you for coming to take our man's place for a time."

"That's all right," the American, whose name was Peter, replied, and at the moment he looked as if he didn't give a hoot about being nurse maid to a small boy. Presently they were riding side by side, and the little lad's pleasure was so evident that Peter mentally classified him as a "poor little duffer" and started in earnest to help his pupil. It did not take him long to develope a real interest in the young Duke, who, when he got a chance, was just like any other boy. He had a genuine love for horses, which won Peter's heart, so during the half hour, any number of stories about ranches and round-ups were interpolated in the lesson. When it was over, Boris' eyes shone with pleasure, and he bowed formally.

"Thank you very much. You have told me a great deal about horses that I never heard before."

"See you tomorrow," said Peter, then led the animals to the stables, and thought a

great deal about the lad whose father had been banished from his son and country. "Some folks get a lot of mean breaks," he remarked to himself.

"He is an American, like George and his father, and perhaps he will help us," was singing through Boris' mind as he turned his attention to his next duty.

"Did you enjoy your lesson with the new groom?" his aunt asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed," he replied keeping the real depths of his enjoyment safely hidden. "But I shall be happy when my own man recovers."

"You are becoming more splendid every day," his aunt assured him. "I am delighted with your progress, my lad, and your loyalty to your duty. It is a trust put upon you from God, and no one is so capable of fitting you for coming responsibilities than I am."

"I owe you a great deal," Boris answered, and bent dutifully over her hand and kissed it.

"Now you are getting old enough to appreciate a little of what your uncle and I have done for you, the sacrifice we have been

making," she responded, then left the room, for study time must be strictly observed.

After that the days each held at least this one half hour when Boris enjoyed himself, and Peter, when the opportunity permitted, showed in dozens of little ways that he did not mind his new duties at the castle. He had been there a week when Lillian joined them in the ride, and announced, a bit sadly, that she was returning to school the following day.

"I have had such a wonderful summer," she said.

"You have been, to me, most kind," Boris answered. "I shall miss seeing you."

"Perhaps you will, but not for long, because George will be back soon and you will like seeing him—"

"Indeed I shall," Boris replied with enthusiasm, and Lillian felt a little hurt, but did not tell him so. "When is he coming?"

"In two days," was the answer. "He has had a wonderful time but we must all get to our studies."

"You have real vacations with no tutors

while I must have lessons even in warm weather."

"Well," laughed Peter, "when you are grown-up and put aside school books, you will find there are other lessons, good stiff ones that will make you wish you were back to the days of French verbs."

"Oh, oh," protested Lillian, "I never shall."

"It will be a strange wish," Boris added.

"Now, we just have time for a little race," Peter reminded them. "Down to the tall rock. That puts me in mind of my part of this little old globe." They set off at once and had a jolly ride, then the small duke went in to change.

For the next two days it seemed to him as if the time would never pass. Then came George, strolling in as usual in knickers, square-cut coat and golf stockings so gay that they might have been designed by some Rumanian peasant with an excessive love of color.

"Hear me coming?" the boy laughed cheerily.

"I heard you *were* coming," Boris replied,

but, although the pair wandered to the fountain rim, there was no opportunity for the American to give any details of his trip to London, and at last, with a grimace, he started back to his own home.

"We've got to think up something," he whispered, but that was all he dared say. Boris tried his level best to think of some way by which he could get the news for which he longed. It came unexpectedly and in a way the boy never suspected. Two afternoons later when he was riding with Peter, the new groom turned their horses' heads toward the huge rock which reminded him of his own land, and when they reached the spot, signaled that they would go around it. On the other side he dismounted, motioned his pupil to do the same, then standing so they were well concealed from passers-by, the man took something from inside his shirt.

"Last night I went to the Masse's and George asked me to give you this," he said very quietly.

"Oh, thank you so much." Eagerly the small hands took the packet.

"George told me something about it be-

cause I wasn't doing anything too blind, like a horse with blinkers, and he said you had better read it carefully then give it back to me. I brought you here because it's the best place, and I'll keep my eyes open so no one will surprise us." Peter was as good as his word and Boris could hardly wait to get the sheets unfolded. Finally they were spread open and the boy's eyes devoured the pages. *"My beloved son:*

When these lines reach you I shall be in Hungarian territory, ten miles from the Rumanian border. Your friend delivered your dear letter to me and talked with me about you until my heart was lifted with gladness. Since I left our country I have devoted every possible effort to establish my innocence and bring the truth of my exile before the king. It has been a long tedious task, the details of which I will not take the time to set down here, but I will tell you that it is only very recently that I came into possession of papers which will prove that I am and always have been a loyal subject to our country, my boy. It was through the influence of friends in England that I have at

last been successful in securing these documents, which are to be presented to our king. Then I shall await the day when I can return, cleared of all suspicion, take my place with you, my dear lad. I too have been very lonely for you and surmised that you were not free to communicate with me; also that my letters to you were probably not delivered to you. When I return, my dear boy, we will do everything possible to relieve the suffering of our people. Thank the dear Lord that the clouds are rolling away, the skies clearing, and soon I shall fold you in my arms again. Your very fine young American friend, George, told me that you are growing toward manhood and words are inadequate to express my happiness at receiving an uncensored communication from you at last.

"As to being an explorer in Africa let us not think of that at present, for even in years to come when you have truly reached man's stature, I am not sure that I shall want to part with you.

"It is very important that none of the contents of this letter be read by other eyes than

yours, and although you are very young in years, I am trusting you to watch yourself constantly lest you betray any of this information.

"God guard and protect you, my beloved son.

Your father."

Eagerly Boris read every word, then read it over to make sure that he was not mistaken in a single detail. It was some time since his father had written the letter and even now might be in Rumania. With a smothered little gasp of pure joy, the boy folded the precious sheets, gave them a shy kiss, then glanced around for Peter.

"Finished?" That worthy was close by.

"Yes, thank you so much," he replied, then, because of the importance of not letting anyone know how happily his heart sang, he drew his face into its most sober lines and handed the packet to the groom. "You have been most kind."

"That's all right. I'm going to burn these," Peter answered and tucked them inside his shirt. "Hop on and we must ride back quickly." Boris hopped at once, turned

his mount's head and by that time the groom was beside him. They galloped a little way and the lad's cheeks were so rosy that anyone seeing him at the moment would have been positive that he had been spending the half hour in a wonderful ride.

It was not an easy matter to keep his feet from dancing, his lips from singing the glorious news to the whole world, but he managed to act about as usual and if in his eyes there was a new hopeful light, he concealed the fact under dropped lashes. Days passed, active busy ones which stretched into weeks and months. The winter came and went, during which time Boris heard no other word from or of his father, then one day as he returned from his ride he happened to overhear his aunt and uncle discussing something very seriously. They were speaking in low tones and seemed to have some disquieting news, but the Duchess gave her shoulders a shrug.

"My dear brother, we are getting disturbed over nothing. Why should a message to appear before the King mean anything more than that His Majesty desires our

presence at Court? We have confined ourselves to our own affairs and attending to Boris; now he no doubt wishes to have us near him."

Uncle Biberescu

"Pray to the Saints that you are right," her brother answered, and Boris' heart leaped. He wondered anxiously if the command for them to appear before the king meant that his father had at least been heard and was summoning his aunt and uncle to account for their stewardship. The little

fellow hoped hard that it was. Although the Duchess had tried to assure her brother, the departure of the pair was conducted unostentatiously; they did not even pay a visit to the young nephew. He had no regret about this. It was fine to have them out of the castle so he hurried to the chapel where he prayed the good Saints that they would never come back.

A few days passed, then a delightfully warm spring evening when the mountain streams came rushing down free of their prison of ice, Boris heard the swift sound of several automobiles racing up the great driveway. Somehow they did not sound like any cars used by the family, and with a wildly beating heart, he threw down his lessons and ran as fast as his feet could carry him to the nearest balcony. The foremost car stopped, someone leaped out and without even pausing to glance about him, hurried up the wide stairway. Doors were swung open, cries of welcome resounded

through the ancient castle, but above it all came a deep booming voice.

"Boris, Boris, my son." A half minute later the little lad was folded in the loving arms of his re-instated father, and all he could say was:

"Dad, dad."

The End